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VOX

Welcome to Issue 28. Like solo improvisation (see **Rubberneck 27**), large-scale improvisation is still an undervalued and misunderstood area of improvised music. One influential school of thought suggests that the large numbers involved (say 10 improvisors and upwards) militate against the production of coherent music, unless some form of 'structuring' is employed. Notwithstanding the perennial controversy surrounding the use of structuring elements in improvisation, rigorously explored by Simon H Fell in another important essay, Barry Guy and London Jazz Composers Orchestra, and Vladimir Miller and Moscow Composers Orchestra, continue to demonstrate that large-scale 'comprovisation' (for want of a better hybrid) can be an exceptionally satisfying enterprise where free improvisation has a meaningful voice. Yet, it seems to me that large-scale *freely* improvised music, free of structuring elements, has become scarce. It's many years since a recording like Globe Unity's *Improvisations* (Japo, 1977) came my way. Here, you'll hear the unique glories of undirected large-scale improv: the frightening density of multitextured activity, the exhilarating sense of order bordering on chaos (and sometimes boiling over) that only a big band can generate. And delicacy, light and space when the many make way for solo, duo, trio voices, emerging spontaneously without premeditated invitation. I'd like more of this, not just occasionally at gigs, but preserved for posterity on disc, to show how individuality and collectivity can thrive together when many improvisors are gathered. Keep in touch!

Chris Blackford/December 1998

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"And that's my end, for man can wish no more,
Than so to write, as none e'er writ before."
Rochester (1647-1680)

If you find mistakes in this magazine, please remember that they are there for a purpose. We try to publish something for everyone, and some people are always looking for mistakes.

Structures and Tensions

For nearly 30 years London Jazz Composers Orchestra has been at the cutting-edge of large-scale improvisation. **Declan O'Driscoll** talks to **Barry Guy**, founder, leader, bass player and principal composer.

By forming the London Jazz Composers Orchestra in 1970, Barry Guy proposed a major shift in the parameters of European improvised music and, in the process, proved that composition and improvisation could be successfully integrated. His compositions for the group have provided a forum in which musicians could place themselves in relation to the score rather than be subsumed by it. It is unlikely that any of the 80 or so musicians who have at one time been members of LJCO could say that they sacrificed their individuality when playing as part of the group. What they did was to realise and bring to life some of the most challenging and powerful scores ever played by a big band. For all their complexity these compositions were no more restrictive than the frame which encloses the wild gestures and splashes of an abstract expressionist painting.

Ode (1972), LJCO's debut recording, which remains a remarkable achievement, began what Guy has called the group's first phase, during which Buxton Orr was employed as conductor. Later in this phase Guy's compositions became, by his own admission, "increasingly academic", and eventually he initiated the group's second phase by suggesting that other members of the group add to the compositional role. This led to structures and graphic scores by Tony Oxley, Paul Rutherford and Howard Riley. At various later stages the group expanded to become a European ensemble with the inclusion of Peter Brötzmann, Peter Kowald, Irène Schweizer and Pierre Favre. In its third era, when Guy again became the main composer, LJCO further expanded its vision by welcoming Anthony Braxton and George Lewis to act as directors for performances of their work. Marilyn Crispell has played on the recording 'Sleeping Furiously', one of the **Three Pieces For Orchestra** (1995), and on the newly released **Double Trouble Two** (recorded 1995) where she solos alongside fellow pianist Irène Schweizer.

I spoke to Barry Guy at his house in the County Kilkenny countryside of Ireland, where he now lives.

What were the circumstances and conditions in British improvised music which made you decide to bring musicians together to form LJCO?

BG At that time we had the Little Theatre Club in action. We had Ronnie's [Scott's] old place and I was crossing quite a lot of stylistic divides. In the experimental scene there was a really great amount of discovery. It was not only a melting pot of new music, it was also a place to meet and understand and progress with other musical directions. There was this fantastic intensity and that was also being paralleled with my work in the Guildhall School of Music studying western composition, etc. So to bring the musicians together into a large conglomeration was not so unusual. It was just one of the motivational things to bring all my friends together to realise a big piece. I chose the people I was working with so therefore the band had quite a stylistic diversity. I just wanted to make it a really celebratory occasion as well as fulfilling some ambitions for the big ensemble.

A lot of the people who played on ***Ode*** *would have worked in wholly improvised music, so did you feel that there was something within that area of musical activity that needed to be clarified or controlled in some way?*

BG No, I'm not a control freak! For me everything was available in improvised music. It just seemed that my ambition to write for a large ensemble would best be brought off if I had some degree of compositional skills added into the mix. You can, of course, have ensembles of purely improvising

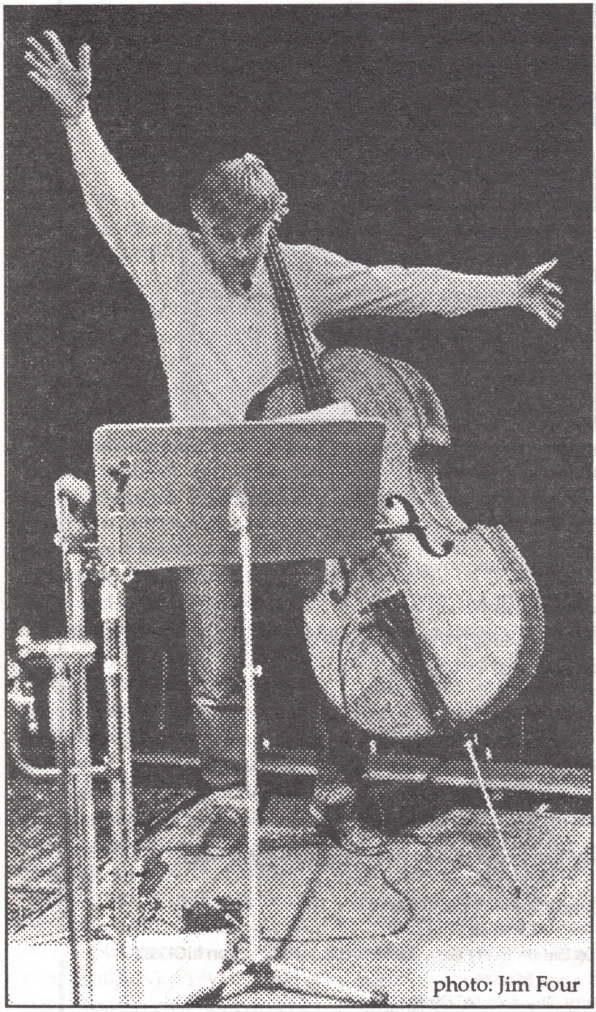


photo: Jim Four

musicians, but I was very much influenced through my studies at Guildhall School of Music to work on a compositional strategy that reflected some elements of western composition. I remember when I went to Guildhall, I really didn't know very much about western music. Discovering Monteverdi, Stravinsky, Bartok, Xenakis, and all of those western composers was actually a revelation to me. There was a spin-off from this, that was to try to understand structure in music and I felt that there was an extra dimension that could be added to experiences of improvised music. There was nothing actually missing from the improvised music, it was just the concept of a large ensemble.

What about the name, London Jazz Composers Orchestra. It seems to me a contentious name. You could argue with each of the four words. Why was that name chosen?

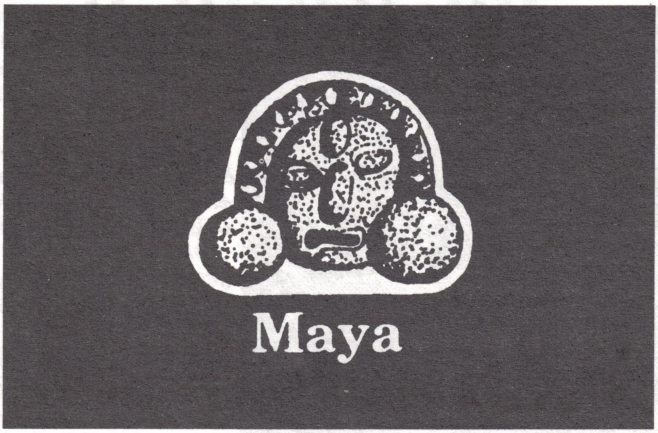
BG Well, all of the guys were in London at that time. It doesn't work like that now, but I'm a Londoner, so it seemed to be perfectly okay to use the name London at that time. As for 'Jazz Composers Orchestra', well there was, of course, Mike Mantler's Jazz Composers Orchestra in New York.

Did that serve as a model, structurally?

BG Not as a model, because I hadn't heard that much of their music. It wasn't so much a model, it was actually more of a philosophy, understanding that something was happening over there which had a similar direction, i.e. putting western compositional ideas with improvising musicians. It was a conceptual thing. So Jazz Composers Orchestra suited me fine because I was using jazz musicians. I considered myself a jazz musician. 'Composers', well I was going to write a big piece, and 'Orchestra', it was more than the usual size that we were used to so it was almost of orchestral proportions. I think that covers the name.

What about the ideological issues that arose within the group. Was there conflict for some of the musicians between your ideas and their views on the sort of music you should involve yourselves with? How, for example, did you persuade Derek Bailey to take part in Ode?

BG Well, I didn't persuade him to take part, I asked him if he wanted to take part. I just phoned him and said, I'm putting this together, I'd like to write a section featuring guitar, would you be interested



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in doing it, and he said yeah, and that's why Derek Bailey was in the band.

Derek Bailey is now regarded as quite a hardliner on the issue of improvised music, in that he won't have anything to do with any notion of composed music.

BG Which is fine by me.

But back then it wasn't such an issue for him?

BG The thing is we were playing together in Iskra, so it wasn't as if I was trying to drag someone kicking and screaming into the band to make some kind of ideological statement about the music. It was by invite only. If people wanted to try and interface with what I was hoping to succeed with then that was great. I was always pleased when people would agree to come along. We did broadcasts, we recorded and also we took the Orchestra under the Musicians Co-Operative to the Berlin Jazz Festival in 1972. The Musicians Co-Operative was involving itself in various ventures, and it was critical of my stance as a sort of big band leader, and we had the usual meetings and usual tensions about, what am I supposed to be doing when there's an area of music that we're trying to promote and that's improvised music. Then I'm coming along starting to write things down which was the paradox and against the rules. I think people's attitudes changed over the years. I think we had difficulties with almost everyone at some point because the scores were either too difficult or they didn't feel that Buxton Orr should be conducting the band because he wasn't a jazz musician, or there were problems with trying to improvise within quite complex directions in the score.

As it happened, after **Ode** my pieces got more and more difficult, more orientated towards compositional procedures and the improvisors found it increasingly difficult to play within the structure. That's when some people felt alienated, so, for instance, Derek had enough of it. I also think the concept of rehearsing was very difficult because I wanted my rehearsals to run almost like a symphony orchestra which was definitely against the grain for most of the guys, but the only way to bring the pieces off required a certain type of discipline. I recorded many of the early rehearsals and it's unbelievable what went on. For the life of me, I can't imagine how we played any of those pieces because no one seems to listen. Buxton is shouting instructions and everybody is playing their own thing or having conversations. Crazy really, but then it worked.

Is it possible to give a general idea of how you approach a composition?

BG The most important thing of all is that instead of writing for an anonymous ensemble speculatively, the compositions are written around people. I have very specific sounds in my mind when I'm dealing with the musicians, so I see the face and the sound. If I'm thinking of Trevor [Watts] or Evan [Parker] or Paul [Rutherford], or any of the musicians, these are very distinct players and because I know how they normally improvise I have expectations that the music might take particular directions. It's not fixed, but it's a tension that you have in your grasp. It's very much the art of balancing the strategies. I have this idea that sound is energy and energy is structure. It's how you bring all of these people together in terms of their individual sounds and then you build the structure of the piece out of these energies, these combined galaxies of possibilities and personalities.

When you're writing these pieces with particular individuals in mind, can you just sit at the board and compose directly on to paper?

BG Well, I usually start with sketches and paintings or marks. More to do with brush strokes or very soft pencil gestures, or something like that which actually shows energy moves and perhaps moments when the music settles. Sometimes I would then put a little grouping on to paper to indicate where it might appear in the overall structure and the sequence of groupings and orchestral interludes, etc. So it's a very slow process. At the same time I would have the keyboard around and the bass available as the different tensions appear to be building. Very often I might have 10 pieces of paper under way with a different emphasis on the groupings. It is

photo: Declan O'Driscoll

like a jigsaw puzzle, all the pieces are on the board and I'm gradually shuffling them into place as the concept of the structure becomes clearer. I sometimes reverse what I thought was a very good tactic and at a certain point I think, that doesn't actually work there, so I might turn the whole thing around. It's always open to change. Improvising really.

You mention in the liner notes for the CD reissue of Ode that one reason for the continued existence of LJCO is your "desire to research an expanded scenario for the large ensemble." Is the sense of a piece not quite working the reason to compose the next piece?

BG No, it's not really like that. Normally, these days, I manage to get a piece to work and it's because it works that I want to do the next piece, not because it doesn't work. Normally during the rehearsal I enter into a state of despair where I think, I'll never do this again because it's so difficult to get the thing off the ground. But then what happens is, in concert there's this extraordinary change where everybody is concentrating and the piece takes on another life, another dimension. So at that stage I normally say, I'll have to do this again. It fires me up to do the next piece. There was only one time I've written a piece and ended up in despair, that's when I opened it out to the guys in the Orchestra to do the compositions. It took only about half the life of the band for me to realise how to write for it with an intention and clarity that made sense!

Do you listen back to LJCO recordings?

BG Sometimes.

How do you feel about them when you do?

BG I'm always impressed by how we managed to pull the thing off. These days, the rehearsals aren't terribly long so we have to work exceedingly hard. The pattern of the last few years is: composition is written, project is set up and money is found. Within a few days we've done all the rehearsals, then we do a concert. Then we're into the recording studio. The sadness of all this is that after you've played these things another 10 times they take on a new dimension because everybody is more relaxed with it. Whenever you put something down on tape you always want to do it again.

You have now gone back to ***Double Trouble*** *(1989), calling the new version* ***Double Trouble Two*** *(1995). Why have you returned to that piece?*

BG Well, the original **Double Trouble** was written for Globe Unity and LJCO and featured Howard Riley and Alex von Schlippenbach as the two piano soloists. The band was about 33 people and it happened once in Cologne and that was it. Then the piece became **Double Trouble** for one pianist, Howard Riley. The piece was conceived for two pianos and despite what Howard could do, structurally it was imbalanced a little bit. Then there was a chance of doing it with Marilyn Crispell and Irène Schweizer which brought back the possibility of balancing the architecture again. But I didn't just want to go back to the original piece using the same strategies for the two pianos because I had some different ideas — an axis of pianos and percussion with Paul Lytton and Pierre Favre adding to the drama. For me, it's a much more satisfactory piece now. It's very exciting the way Marilyn, Irène, Paul and Pierre play, it gives it that depth, the dimension which was missing. In a way it's a new piece retaining the signature of the previous version.

What do you plan to do next?

BG I'm turning my energies to a new orchestra which is the Barry Guy New Orchestra. It's more and more difficult to get concerts for a 17-piece big band, so the New Orchestra will be forming next year. The nexus of this band is the trios of Parker/Guy/Lytton, Guy/Gustafsson/Strid and the trio with Marilyn Crispell and Paul Lytton and various duo connections that have occurred in recent years. The band is like a spider's web with many strands forming the whole structure. The New Orchestra is a reflection of all my activities within the last few years. There is a cross connection of all the players. Hans Koch, I did a duo with him. Herb Robertson who played with us and has done some work with Paul Lytton. I've a duo with Johannes Bauer. Per Ake Holmander, who is a tuba player, I've worked with in Sweden along with Mats, Marilyn, Paul Lytton and Raymond Strid. So what I'm interested in finding is a looser format because it's very much an improvising band.

It sounds like a return to first beginnings where all the different musicians you had been working with in the Little Theatre Club, and so on, merged into LJCO. Now your recent groupings have begun to come together as the New Orchestra.

BG That's a good observation. I think that's about right.

Does this mean the end of LJCO?

BG No, certainly not. Whenever we can play the Orchestra, I'll put it on. But it really has become a financial liability. We've managed to sustain the Orchestra over these years by selling various instruments. Because of my days in baroque music I'd accumulated quite a few basses and these have had to be sold off one by one to make sure the next project could happen. But the situation is, it's becoming harder and harder to get the band on. The money's getting less and less and festivals are getting more specific about the type of music they want to put on, with a few notable exceptions. So the 10-piece project would, on paper anyhow, give us more chances to do some of the festivals that wouldn't consider the 17-piece band.

But the LJCO does have a future?

BG As far as I'm concerned, yeah. I love the sound of it, I love the people in it and even if it's a frustrating band to get together, when it comes off I have new blood for the next time. So it's an addiction in a way, but an expensive addiction. **R**

LJCO's latest CD release is ***Double Trouble Two****, which is available on Intakt Records (P.O. Box 468, CH 8024 Zürich, Switzerland).*

DISCOGRAPHY

Ode (1972) (Intakt CD041); **Stringer** (1980) (FMP/SAJ 41 LP); **Zurich Concerts** (1987-88) (Intakt CD005); **Harmos** (1989) (Intakt CD013); **Double Trouble** (1989) (Intakt CD019); **Theoria** (1991) (Intakt CD024); **Portraits** (1993) (Intakt CD035); **Three Pieces For Orchestra** (1995) (Intakt CD045); **Double Trouble Two** (1995) (Intakt CD053)

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Magazines...

Avant (#7, Summer 1998) Eddie Prévost, Don Byron, John Wolf Brennan, Nicky Heinen, Roger Sutherland, George Russell, Arto Lindsay. Reviews section covers free jazz, improv and contemporary classical. (£2.99) *Avant, 10 Baddow Road, Chelmsford, Essex CM2 0DG, England.*

Esculpiendo Milagros (#14, July 1998) An eclectic magazine from Argentina. Main interview is with Chris Cutler. Plus articles about Jim O'Rourke, doo-wop, post-rock, and contemporary composition. Reviews section. Well presented. (in Spanish) *Esculpiendo Milagros, Casilla de Correo 2023, C.P. (1000) Correo Central, Buenos Aires, Argentina.*

Monitor (#46, June 1998) Small, newsletter type magazine from Portugal. Interview with Nuno Rebelo and short article on Edgard Varèse. Reviews section offers valuable coverage of free jazz and improv. (in Portuguese) *Monitor, Apartado 21671, 1137 Lisboa Codex, Portugal.*

Musicworks (#71, Summer 1998) Congratulations to all the team at **Musicworks** on their 20th anniversary! Long may they continue to publish their important magazine. This issue includes Randy Raine-Reusch, Tan Dun, Ana-Maria Avram, Iancu Dumitrescu, David Tudor, Ann Southam. Reviews section. *Musicworks, 179 Richmond Street West, Toronto, Ontario, Canada M5V 1V3.*

Revue & Corrigée (#37, Sept 1998) John Wall, Toy Bizarre, Kaffe Matthews, Sue Garner. CD reviews. (in French) *Revue & Corrigée, 25 rue Docteur Bordier, 38100 Grenoble, France.*

The Wire Recent issues have featured Matthew Shipp, Fred Frith, Toshinori Kondo, Lê Quan Ninh, Ken Vandermark, Hugh Davies, Tim Hodgkinson, Ikue Mori, Toru Takemitsu. Stylish and intelligent coverage of marginalised musics. (£2.80) *The Wire, 45-46 Poland Street, London W1V 3DF.* **R**

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Circuit

Russian Unorthodox

Since the early 90s Moscow Composers Orchestra has become established as one of the leading exponents of large-scale improvisation. Its ambitious works typically include references to Russian and Siberian folk traditions, while also exploring free jazz and abstract improv. **Chris Blackford** talks to **Vladimir Miller**, MCO's founder, leader, pianist and composer.

photo: Vladimir Luchin

Perhaps you could begin by describing some of your most important musical and cultural influences given your mixed British and Russian background.

VM Having been brought up in a Russian speaking family in England, my early musical background was greatly influenced by the people, culture and events that took place inside the home of a Russian household. My parents were both singers and sang regularly in a Russian Orthodox church choir, and sometimes with their friends spent evenings reciting Russian poetry, and those with guitars sang Bard, a Russian ballad tradition. I often heard songs by Galitch, Visotsky and Bulat Okudzhava.

individuality

I suppose this is what led me to learn to play the piano and simultaneously to seek out other music forms. I became interested by the music of Stravinsky, Mussorgsky and Bartók. My direction took a dramatic change after I'd heard for the first time the music of John Coltrane and his contemporaries. Before then I thought modern music was eclipsed in some sort of a 'progressive rock' time warp. I particularly enjoyed the music of the German group Amon Düül. It was at this point that I started exploring the world of jazz and improvised music. I joined Howard Riley's piano and discussion study groups at Goldsmiths College, London, and learned not only about the many facets and language of jazz music, but more importantly that improvisation is not an idiom in itself where the main area of attention is the acquisition of information, but the development of music individuality where creativity is the most valued commodity.

*In the sleevenotes to **An Italian Love Affair** (1995) you briefly refer to the big band tradition in Russia.*

Could you explain in a little more detail here what this tradition is, and also what led you to form Moscow Composers Orchestra.

VM MCO was formed some time at the beginning of the 1990s. It was initially intended as a 'free' blowing improvisation group that met occasionally but with few performances. Its intention was to form a collective that was made up of the many musicians that emerged from the huge improvisation scene in Russia during the 1980s. Other big bands were already running at that time in many different areas of the former Soviet Union. In Leningrad (now St. Petersburg) there was the very successful Sergey Kuryokhin's Pop Mechanics which drew its inspiration from Kuryokhin's ability to integrate many music forms polystylistically, almost like Alfred Schnittke but with a broader scope for spontaneity with jazz as its foundation.

catalyst

Other free improvisation big bands during this period included the Vladimir Tolkashov Orchestra from Siberia, an experimental band using folk roots from the region, as did Vladimir Rezitsky in northern Russia with his large ensemble Jazz Group Arkhangelsk. Big bands have also been formed by Vladimir Chekasin and Vladimir Tarasov in Lithuania, two of the musicians that made up the celebrated group the Ganelin Trio. But perhaps what is most striking and unusual about big band music, and why the avant-garde still flourishes in Russia, is that it already had its roots established in the 1920s and 30s. In the 20s the then new Soviet regime encouraged jazz tunes and melodies in their big band state orchestras, whilst in the 30s a new concept in theatre, the absurdist theatre, was being created by the art group OBERIU and its founder Daniil Kharms. Although these art forms were disallowed by the state by the end of the 30s, creative theatre and music (sometimes as an amalgamated art form) returned in the late 1970s and early 80s, albeit at first performed in secret, 'underground', and by word of mouth.

In a sense, Moscow Composers Orchestra was a natural step forward towards forming a band that could act as a catalyst, that represented a certain proportion of musicians that had played a significant part in defining creative music in Russia today. Over the last five years, since the first recording and radio performance in January 1993 (see **Kings And Cabbages**), MCO has been represented by 38 musicians.

traditional links

I notice that MCO personnel has changed somewhat over the three recordings for Leo Records. Is this because of the non-availability of certain musicians, or are you interested in keeping things fresh by making changes to the line-up? Perhaps you could also talk about some of the personalities in MCO and what qualities you feel they bring to the Orchestra.

VM There are many reasons for this. Non-availability of particular musicians is an on-going problem and it is healthy and fortunate that there is a large pool of willing musicians to choose from. The background of many of the personnel in MCO is as interesting as it is diverse. Slava Guyvoronsky (trumpet), Alexander Alexandrov (bassoon) and Arkady Shilkloper (French horn) have traditional Russian classical music disciplines, whilst the wide-ranging influx of folk traditions from many parts of the former Soviet Union has fed and influenced their individual development, and in a sense has inspired a mentality of greater flexibility. Slava's improvisational technique, for instance, largely stems from his interpretations of Russian folk song traditions such as 'Plach' (weeping) and communal dance songs. His longstanding duo relationship with bass player Vladimir Volkov has created adaptations of many indigenous folk music styles. Their recording, **Russian Songs**, on Melodia Records bears testimony to their deep interest in maintaining links with previous traditions in Russia. Yuri Parfenov (trumpet) and Oleg Ruvinov (tuba) have folk and mainstream jazz backgrounds, the former having been musically brought up in Khazakstan where he has played in big bands and is now the lead soloist in the Russian Alec Lundstram big band, which was founded in 1934 in Shanghai, China, and is actually still being led by Mr Lundstram.

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FINLANDIA
HA! WHAT'S GOING ON!

The first CD from Finland in the Leo Records catalogue. Baron Paakkunainen (saxes), Eero Ojanen (piano), Teppo Hauta-aho (bass) are the top Finnish musicians who started making music together some thirty years ago. Over the years they played with Anthony Braxton, Dexter Gordon, Ben Webster, and quite recently with Cecil Taylor. One can't ask for higher credentials than that.

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QUINTET
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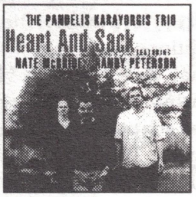
Debut recording by the quintet of guitarist Keith Yaun will catapult him and his group to the prominent position on the American new music scene. The names of Mat Maneri and John Lockwood are well known, but the tenor saxophonist Nathan Cook will be a revelation for many. A friend who listened to the master said: *"this group is a guarantee that Joe Maneri's music will live".*



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Sainkho Namchylak

It has been said that some kind of pre-planned structure or framework is necessary when working with large-scale improvising groups, so as to avoid a rather predictable musical outcome where the individual's intentions are cancelled out by the sheer weight of numbers involved. What are your thoughts on this subject?

VM The music framework of MCO is by and large reliant on who is available at the time, as is time that is allocated to rehearsals, and this in turn directly determines the direction and dimension of the initial structure of a composition. There are many problems associated with large-scale improvising groups. Apart from the obvious personality clashes and individuals who desire a greater input in the implementation of an idea, there is the problem of sound. Sometimes the progression of an improvisation idea can be lost if the outcome is subjected to and overshadowed by the sheer volume of the musicians involved, just as the dominance of individuals during improvisation can lead the music to an unintended area of a composition. There is, of course, a dilemma in that an unintended area can also have manifestations and lead to constructive and creative territories that act as springboards for further creative interaction. It seems that too much rigidity can also hamper creative interplay. However, a strong concept is often essential if improvisation is to work within a set creative framework.

block formations

It's obvious from your Leo recordings that you like to compose themes for the Orchestra to work with, and these are sometimes the starting points for improvisations. Could you talk about some of the methods you use to structure improvisations.

VM I have often used composed themes as starting points for improvisations, whereas in 'Let Peremsky Dream' there are six that crossfade into one another through a numbered system of group improvisational blocks. With cross-references to the themes, the improvisations act as colouristic blocks that deny the tonal and melodic interludes. Through the use of certain combinations of instruments, such as French horn, trombone and voice that shifts from a piano, bassoon and trumpet section, the contrasting sounds possess surprisingly rich transient areas. During these block formations I have also used, for example,

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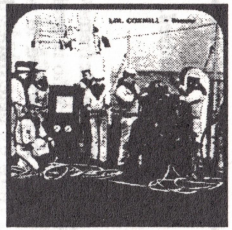

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a trombone solo cadenza that gradually grows into a combined group transformation of timbre and rhythm. Conversely, during large-scale improvisations I have also attempted a graphically based score, whereby certain instruments are phased in or out of short written instrumental demands, such as a sharp *sforzando* that evolves into a continuous descending glissando which eventually enters an area of polymetric ostinato patterns.

And Tuvan vocalist Sainkho Namchylak has become an important guest contributor to MCO recordings, her highly distinctive performances taking several pieces to some quite outlandish places.

VM Yes, as a soloist Sainkho Namchylak has provided additional sound devices through her extreme vocal range, from high sounds (Sigit) to low (Kargiraa) Tuvan throat singing techniques. I have explored the possibilities of large-group improvisation sections that remained idiomatic to her extended voice parts. This has worked particularly well when Sainkho has remained focused on certain vocal features. In a composition called 'Five Pieces In The Key Of Kharms And Beyond', I wanted to explore the integration of timbre, melody, harmony and rhythm with that of the combined languages of Russian poetry (Daniil Kharms) and Sainkho's articulations. Here, I had hoped that large-group improvisation passages would echo Kharms' and Sainkho's alliance with metre and phrase movement.

uncharted territories

In your role as conductor do you make decisions about which combinations of instruments should take part at a particular time during a performance?

VM As a whole, I try to make as many decisions as possible in connection with which combination of instruments are to play at any given time during improvisational sections within the framework of a composed piece. But there are times when it is fundamental to the flow of the music to resist the temptation to take on the role of a conductor and direct from above. This takes away the essence of a music genre that relies on the spirit of creativity and the skill of a collective conscious and unconscious movement towards uncharted music territories.

In conclusion, returning to matters Russian. Given the present crisis in the Russian economy, what is your view of the current state of new music in Russia?

renaissance

VM In Russia, this movement is experiencing a renaissance paradoxically during a period of economic and near political crisis. More people than ever before since the start of the Yeltsin era are not only attending concerts of experimental music, but there are unprecedented rises in attendances in theatre, exhibitions and classical concerts. This is probably a reaction to the enormous financial losses people have experienced at the workplace, and also loss of trust in the political system. In a way this will affect new music in the near future, where there is a reliance upon sponsors and local government to help finance festivals, concerts, and release new recordings. Successful, recently formed new music labels, such as Long Arms Records, will face drawbacks if not extinction. But Russian audiences of new music are very supportive, and the deep-rooted culture in music and understanding and interest now appearing in younger people, is almost a guarantee that new music will survive the internal economic and social pressures in Russian society today. **R**

MCO's latest CDs are ***Let Peremsky Dream*** *(Leo Lab) and* ***The Gift*** *(Long Arms). Leo Records, The Cottage, 6 Anerley Hill, London SE19 2AA / Long Arms Records, P.O. Box 13, Moscow 113639, Russia; e-mail: longarms@avantart.com*

DISCOGRAPHY

Kings And Cabbages (Leo Lab CD005, 1993 CD); with Sainkho Namchylak, **An Italian Love Affair** (Leo Lab CD019, 1995 CD); with Sainkho Namchylak, **Let Peremsky Dream** (Leo Lab CD 035, 1996 CD); with Sainkho Namchylak, **The Gift** (Long Arms CDLA 9708, 1996 CD)

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Twins Peak

Institute Benjamenta, Or This Dream People Call Human Life
(1995) Dir. Brothers Quay
with Mark Rylance, Alice Krige, Gottfried John, Daniel Smith
ICA Projects ICAV 1020
104 mins, Black & White

Institute Benjamenta sees the American Quay twins (Stephen and Timothy, born 1947) making their live-action feature debut, having already gained an international reputation for richly inventive animated films. Borowczyk and Svankmajer are other celebrated animators — whose surrealist influence is perceptible in Quay work — to have successfully made this transition.

Prospective viewers should acquaint themselves with Swiss writer Robert Walser's 1908 novel *Jakob von Gunten* on which **Institute Benjamenta** is based (the novel is published in the UK by Serpent's Tail under the film title). However, the Quays and screenplay collaborator Alan Passes have taken liberties with the novel, most noticeably by making protagonist Jakob (Mark Rylance) and fellow students

at this extraordinary school for servants considerably older than Walser's schoolboys. While a certain vulnerability and pathos have thus been heightened, the complexity of Jakob's mental life has been disappointingly reduced to bewilderment and willing obedience. In the novel, which is his private journal, he is also capable of pride, pomposity, naivety, truculence, intellectual acuity, and sexual arousal. A few carefully chosen passages would have restored these important characteristics without upsetting the pervasive enigmatic mood of the piece.

In terms of characterisation, most attention here has been devoted to Johannes and Lisa Benjamenta, the brother and sister partnership in command at the Institute. Jakob's arrival, and his subsequent status as unwitting *agent provocateur*, signal the gradual collapse of the Benjamentas' governance, as their repressed fears and desires surface. In Johannes, magisterially played by Gottfried John, the Quays sensitively draw out a homosexual inclination (less evident in the novel) towards Jakob, and a clear suggestion of a hesitant, unfulfilled incestuous desire between him and Lisa, again only very covertly hinted at in the novel. Lisa (which is also the name of Walser's sister) is played to perfection by Alice Krige who, with memorable equanimity, registers every nuance of emotion from abject lovelessness to mildly hysterical sexual frustration. The meaning behind these power games and ritualistic acts of subordination and subjugation, in which the Quays find delightful moments of bizarre deadpan humour, is never fully revealed; nor is the secret of the Benjamentas' "inner chambers" (surely not merely a goldfish in a bowl). One suspects that the Benjamentas' forbidden love — certainly the greatest act of emotional subjugation here — may be the underlying cause of the uneasy atmosphere in their dilapidated Institute.

This atmosphere is superbly evoked by the Quays customary visual flair and meticulous attention to *mise-en-scène* detail, where live-action and animation sequences are seamlessly integrated. The black and white photography is exquisite, each gentle movement of light in shadowy corridors creates an air of dream-like enchantment (echoes of Cocteau and Vigo). Classroom scenes in misty greys are invigorated by Jankowski's versatile score: a waltz turns into free jazz. Repeat viewings reveal the subtlety of the Quays' art. R

Chris Blackford

film score

Leonard Rosenman
East Of Eden/Rebel Without A Cause (Nonesuch Film Series 7559-79402-2 CD)

Two new recordings of Leonard Rosenman's (born Brooklyn, USA 1924) better known scores performed by the London Sinfonietta, conducted by the US composer John Adams. Rosenman's classical training (his teachers include Arnold Schoenberg, Roger Sessions and Luigi Dallapiccola) pervades his work for films, in which he's never been afraid to incorporate avant-garde methods; he's also pursued a parallel career writing for the concert hall.

Encouraged by Leonard Bernstein and Aaron Copland to take up composing for films, Rosenman's first project was Elia Kazan's **East Of Eden** (1955), now largely remembered for James Dean's impressive screen debut. At its most reassuring in the gentle, folk-like main theme, the score is often reminiscent of Copland's pastoral style, as displayed to charming effect in his score for Sam Wood's film **Our Town** (1940). Rosenman's spacious, translucent strings are also Coplandesque, but he reveals his own voice in many subtle and succinct thematic variations where the melodic writing becomes darker and more ambivalent, most notably in 'Fog Scene' and 'Bedroom Window'. Adams mostly obtains a sensitive, light touch from the Sinfonietta, though they deliver an effectively rugged punch on the rhythmically vigorous cue 'Cal And Aron Visit Mother'.

From the rural pre-20s to 1950s middle-class suburbia for Rosenman's second film score, **Rebel Without A Cause** (1955). You'd be forgiven for having paid more attention to James

Leonard Rosenman

Dean's legendary performance as the misunderstood proto-teenager, ably supported by an equally troubled Natalie Wood.

In the cinema, jazz was still synonymous with disaffected youth (but rock 'n' roll was fast approaching), so for **Rebel** Rosenman skilfully combines it with concert hall modernism, achieving a kind of third stream amalgam — one that had earlier fascinated Stravinsky (*Ebony Concerto*), Milhaud (*La création du monde*) and Copland (*Piano Concerto*). His only concession to 50s melodrama is a splendid, tender love theme, given a lush reading topped with muted trumpets in the 'Main Title'. Stratospheric strings and woodwinds connote humankind's existential insignificance in 'The Planetarium', while in 'Knife Fight' jazz rhythms collide with spiky Stravinskyesque rhythms, and 'The Hunt' abounds in angular writing for brass, woodwinds and percussion. Sadly, much of the score's power was reduced because of dialogue and environmental sounds, but Adams and the Sinfonietta have done a great job in restoring all of its marvellous, sharply accented energy.

Jerry Goldsmith
Planet Of The Apes/Escape From The Planet Of The Apes (Varèse Sarabande VSD-5848 CD) Here, for the first time, is the complete original soundtrack to Franklin Schaffner's **Planet Of The Apes** (1968), composed/conducted by Jerry Goldsmith. If the movie isn't to your liking (though in some quarters this allegory of apes, starring Charlton Heston, is regarded as a sci-fi classic) then this is no reason not to be gripped by a stunning score. One of the film industry's most prolific and critically acclaimed composers, Goldsmith (born Los Angeles, 1929) must have written for every genre by now, yet **Planet Of The Apes** remains his most unorthodox, formally inventive score to date.

Responding to the film's peculiar characterisation, bleak futuristic setting and pacy action sequences, the score persists in defiant dissonance to the point where occasional tonality is almost shocking. The key to its success is a capacity to evoke a distinctive soundworld by an

adventurous use of orchestral colour and texture, emanating from unusual instrumental ingredients such as metal sheets and mixing bowls, wood blocks and small percussives (some echoplexed), ram's horn and Brazilian cuica, plus carefully deployed harp, xylophone and snare drum. The results are sometimes reminiscent of Varèse (e.g. *Hyperprism*). Eschewing elaborate themes, Goldsmith uses motivic fragments like the serial phrase played by ethereal flute or high strings, the running piano figures, and the parched cry of the ram's horn. A major film score of great character and originality, marred only by less than crystal clear recording quality. Indispensable.

If **Planet Of The Apes** shows Goldsmith's understanding of avant-garde scoring, previously unavailable **Escape From The Planet Of The Apes** (1971), (third film in the series; Leonard Rosenman scored the second), reveals a competence at bringing rock instrumentation into an orchestral context. Bass guitar provides the rocky rhythmic drive to a thematic score (echoes of John Barry), while twangy electric guitar, sitar, organ, and especially inventive xylophone supply memorable splashes of chromatic colour.

René Lussier
Chronicle Of A Genocide Foretold (Ambiances Magnétiques AM 058 CD) "Fifty years after the Holocaust," the sleevenotes declare, "the world allowed another genocide to occur, this time in Rwanda." Eyewitnesses (the youngest seven years of age) recall the horrific events. A million people massacred in just three months by Hutu extremists, many hacked to death with machetes.

René Lussier's soundtrack to Danièle Lacourse's and Yvan Patry's documentary is for an eight-piece ensemble (Derome, Tanguay, Arcand, Lepage...), plus atmospheric environmental sounds. Abstract improv and sombre themes are thoughtfully integrated: the former touching the raw nerve of ineradicable trauma. Undoubtedly a difficult commission, but René Lussier's response is a work of admirable sensitivity and intelligence. **R**

reviews: **Chris Blackford**

The Golem (1920)
Dir. Paul Wegener
with Paul Wegener, Albert Steinrück, Lyda Salmonova
Screamtime Video SCR5004
69 mins, Black & White

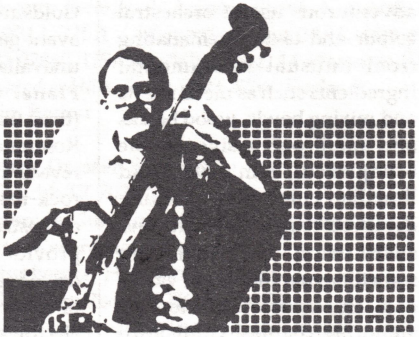
German film director Paul Wegener first established a reputation as an actor with renowned theatre director Max Reinhardt. By April 1916, Wegener was calling for film to escape the formal influence of theatre and the novel. And yet, Reinhardt's chiaroscuro lighting effects proved to be an important influence on Wegener and other emerging directors of German Expressionist cinema — ideal for their obsession with the darker regions of the human psyche and events supernatural and mythical.

Wegener's first version of **The Golem** (1914) is lost, but his second (1920) remains one of the highlights of German silent cinema, boasting a first-rate technical crew including set design by Hans Poelzig and Kurt Richter, photographer Karl Freund (later **The Last Laugh**, and **Metropolis**) and special effects wizard Carl Boese.

Set in the Prague ghetto of 1580 where, legend has it, Rabbi Loew fashions a giant clay creature called the Golem (played by Wegener) to protect the Jews from Rudolph II, tyrannical emperor of Hungary, Germany and Bohemia, **The Golem** is an odd mix of fairy tale, monster movie and religious myth.

A simple tale enlivened by atmospheric studio sets, it's the visual style that impresses most; the quirky stone houses with their pointed roofs, packed into narrow streets; the aberrant Gothic of Loew's curvilinear lab, where a blazing magic circle and smoke-breathing demon are among arresting special effects. Michael Murphy's pedestrian piano/synth music is an irritant, leaving one to imagine the further delights that an orchestral score by Carl Davis or James Bernard would have brought. **R**

Chris Blackford



Report On The Composition Of Improvised Music No.4

Simon H Fell

London Skyscraper and *Compilation III*: some problems of and strategies for working with large improvising ensembles

(i) PROBLEMS

During discussions with the Editor on the theme of this issue, he expressed vehement dismay at a perceived paucity of large-scale improvising ensembles working *completely freely*, without structural mechanisms of any kind (it's interesting to note how politically charged language can become in this context; substitute the word 'support', 'restraint', 'assistance' or 'impositions' for 'mechanisms' in the previous sentence and you'll see what I mean). I'm not sure to what extent this impression is historically accurate, many of the examples of this work one might allude to occur as episodes within some sort of overall structuring, however loose. Nevertheless, the Globe Unity Orchestra have certainly worked extensively as a freely-improvising large group, and Chris Burn's Ensemble have regularly interspersed improvised pieces amongst their repertoire of structures; doubtless everyone will have their own examples. At the time of writing, London Skyscraper (the 23-piece group formed to participate in Butch Morris' UK Conduction tour in November 1997) has been wrestling with the possibilities of an existence post-Butch — whether this is viable, and if so, what form it might take. It's a little too early to predict the outcome, and there seem to be many unexpected difficulties in this process, but part of the group's work in its current series of monthly London concerts has involved completely 'free' collective improvisation, with predictably mixed results (perhaps the Editor could check this out next time he's in town!).

scarce commodity

However, it cannot be denied that large-scale group improvisation has always been a scarce commodity, and 'successful' examples are worth their weight in gold. Why? Experience leads me to assert that the essence of working with large ensembles is that all the difficulties and uncertainties of improvised music making are multiplied proportionately, while the possible benefits (i.e. making good music, albeit of a different sort) remain roughly equivalent. As a result it seems likely that any scarcity in large-scale group improvising is simply the result of the same sort of factors which have affected large-scale perform-

ance generally, but exaggerated in improvised music (in Britain, at least) by the complete lack of a thought-through institutional infrastructure for sustaining this part of our cultural research & development. There are practical problems to do with lack of funding for workshop/rehearsal and performance, and an absence of appropriate venues in which these activities may be undertaken with the long-term view necessary to develop this type of performance successfully; these are then combined with the sheer mental and physical stress and exhaustion inherent in trying to co-ordinate large numbers of performers.

But more significantly, there are often aesthetic problems, too. The more I work in the field, the more I'm forced to accept that there is no 'absolute truth' of improvised music, no realisation of this principle which will be universally agreed to have achieved the music's full potential, and opinions on the merit of a performance will often vary widely even amongst experienced listeners/performers. There can be few things more dispiriting than having assembled a large ensemble to give what you thought was a fine performance only to find that a large proportion of the group disliked the resulting music intensely and would rather you hadn't bothered in the first place! Small-scale groupings make it possible to assemble a set of almost like-minded musicians who will have similar objectives and aesthetic aspirations, and as a result will offer sustained enthusiasm and practical support; but the statistics of a large group will almost invariably throw up several members who are not really sure whether they want to be there; since free music runs almost entirely on enthusiasm and goodwill this can act as a considerable damper on a project's future prospects.

There are also straightforward but often overlooked difficulties in large-scale performance; actually hearing what other players are doing can be difficult if they are physically separated from you by a large number of musicians. This can limit the potential for subtle interaction to only those musicians who are relatively near, or encourage musicians to play more loudly or forcibly than they would otherwise consider. Imagine a conversation between four articulate friends and then compare it to 25 people taking part in an open discussion, each trying to get their point across. Of course, because something is difficult does not mean it shouldn't be attempted, on the contrary; nevertheless, it is easy for those not directly involved to underestimate the problematic nature of this kind of work.

The lack of external infrastructure for this music means it is perhaps to be expected that most instigators of large-scale projects start from a

personal concept which they wish to explore. Not only does this provide an objective which sidesteps the question of mutually-agreed aesthetic criteria, but it also obviates the necessity for the musicians to accept public responsibility for the whole of the resulting music, which can be problematic for improvisors with their own artistic identities. But as soon as one artistic vision has dominance, the role of the large group as an improvising ensemble tends to become blurred. However, it would be a mistake to rigidly categorise improvisation as either 'directed' or 'free' as if these were the only two possible states. One should not forget that there is a *spectrum* from rigidly directed to completely 'free' improvisation; what's more, no point on this spectrum represents a perfect ideal and to dismiss directed improvisation

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because some examples prove unsatisfactory is as foolhardy as asserting that all freely improvised pieces will be 'successful'. It might be wise to bear in mind that if some of the most experienced and skilled improvisors in the music's history have reservations about large-group free improvising, it may just be because experience has taught them that it's a high-risk strategy, possibly with musically modest benefits. But the nature of improvised music is such that if anyone disagrees, they are at liberty to test the outcomes for themselves and will find no shortage of musicians prepared to assist them! Whilst 'abstract' large-group improvisation can thrive, it seems to rely on a combination of factors which are sufficiently infrequently encountered individually that their extremely sporadic coincidence is hardly surprising. Perhaps the question should be how does it ever manage to happen at all?

(ii) STRATEGIES

In commissioning this article the Editor initially [*Yes, initially — Ed*] seemed to feel that my recently-released large-scale project **Compilation III** might provide a useful source of experiences of large-scale improvisation, but in fact **Compilation III** contains very little (if any) music which I would describe as 'large-scale improvisation', being essentially a composition informed by (and with space for) improvisation and aleatoricism. Similarly, one could make great distinction between work like Butch Morris' Conductions, John Zorn's game pieces, the LJCO, etc, and true 'group improvisation'. So as far as this less 'abstract', individual-guided work is concerned, what methods are available for working with large improvisation-derived groups? And what are the dangers of these methods, and how can they be avoided?

Firstly, I'd like to assert two categories of structuring, to be located on the spectrum we discussed earlier — *non-invasive* and *invasive*. My definition of *non-invasive* would be those methods which seek to define very general principles, such as who might play when, a very general description of the type of material to be explored (either verbal or notated) or an indication of the mood/atmosphere which the piece might seek to generate (without specific musical instructions). The essential point of non-invasive structures is that the musicians should feel sufficiently unencumbered that they can improvise sensitively, creatively and effectively, using their musical sensitivities alone to guide them. I've written in **Rubberneck** before about the debilitating affect structure can have on even highly creative improvisors, and this type of 'score' would seek to avoid that by a very light touch. In order to render the *non-invasive* principle feasible, the instigator/leader/composer (more politically charged words!) has to be prepared to relinquish certain things. I am increasingly of the conviction that improvisors cannot improvise to the best of their ability if they are aware that their improvisation may be interrupted at any time, requiring them to suddenly change to a different activity; any group which simply feels it is waiting for the next cue will fail to make the best use of the musical space made available to it.

backward step

One of the most traditional ways of circumventing this problem is to have two types of performer, the soloist(s) and the rest, and for the musicians to be allocated one of those two roles at any given time. Soloists are allowed freedom to develop material, hopefully in their own time, whilst the 'rest' follow cues, realise notation, etc. This is, of course, the organising principle of most large-scale modern/contemporary/free jazz. Its main disadvantage for the improvising ensemble is that it tends to encourage an either/or mentality, with musicians either free to contribute spontaneously or not. Since one of the skills which proves essential to large-group improv is the ability to judge the appropriateness of playing at any given time, and where within the wide-ranging spectrum from silence to total dominance to place this contribution, this compartmentalisation must be a backward step. It seems to encourage musicians to resign their responsibility for the music, which is the last thing improvisation should seek to inherit from classical forms.

It seems to me that a more valuable option is to accept that an improvising orchestra is not going to be able to (or more properly neither needs to nor should want to) emulate the structural effects

and cohesive strategies employed by composed music, and in refusing to try and force the musicians through these hoops, one can allow the tender flower of improvisation to flourish more readily. This doesn't mean that structuring has to be abandoned; it's just that one can't necessarily expect to receive rapid, prompt and accurate responses to instructions *and* good improvisation.

difficult step

One of my own recent compositions for London Skyscraper was **Composition No. 43 (Papers)**, which made extensive use of permanently displayed cue cards to signal changes of activity. Whilst this of course is nothing new, the important point about the piece is that the musicians responded to the cues *as and when they saw them*, rather than when the card was first put on display. I was quite happy for musicians to miss a cue and catch up, or even to miss several sections altogether, if they felt that the music they were making merited more attention than my suggestions. This is a difficult step for a 'composer', to say "actually, what you're doing now is more interesting or creative than what I've asked you to do, so please carry on", but it's a step which composers working with improvisors have to be prepared to take as a matter of course. The musician's part of this equation is that they have to take responsibility for the contribution they're making, and not abuse this freedom simply because it may be easier to just play than try and make a particular concept 'work'.

Other structuring techniques explored by post-Butch Skyscraper include hand gestures and conducting (some derived from Conduction, some not), game and text-based pieces, as well as complete freedom. The degree of success has, of course, been variable, but this is inevitable and even desirable (in one of my earlier **Rubberneck** pieces I wrote about improvised music's move away from the experimental; the difficulties of large-group work mean that it is much more likely to tread the thin line between 'success' and 'failure' in a way which can be extremely stimulating — and very frustrating).

Some of the pieces mentioned above most definitely would fall into the *invasive* category, and

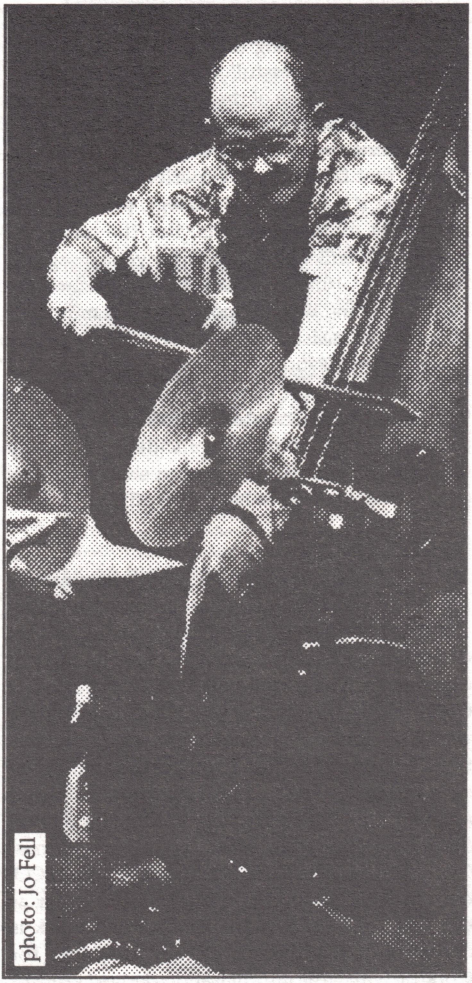


photo: Jo Fell

by this I mean a scheme or structure which requires the musicians to divide their attention between improvising and some other activity (watching the conductor, reading music, throwing sponges around(!), etc). These *invasive* techniques seem to be the ones which prove most problematic for improvisors, and much care is required if they are to be used with any degree of success. One of the most frequently experienced invasive techniques is the use of conventional music notation to assist in the process of structuring. It's worth remembering that Western European music notation has

developed from a simple *aide-mémoire* for spontaneous elaboration and flexible realisation into an all-pervasive restraining straitjacket which has become an object of worship in its own right. When I use notation with improvising musicians, I try and encourage them to return to this original *aide-mémoire* state; a more familiar parallel may be my instruction to play the notation "as if it were a jazz standard that one already knew". This is sometimes difficult when the notation is extremely complex, but only as long as the player tries to play it 'right'; as soon as someone grasps that there are several 'rights' (and I'll let them know if they spill over into the 'wrongs') the process becomes relatively straightforward. At some stage one starts to see the return of energy and personality into the musician's playing; and it can be possible to reinject spontaneity and commitment into apparently sterile notated materials.

spirited commitment

In **Compilation III**, I worked extensively with students, amateurs and other inexperienced performers, using this type of approach to notation to overcome their fear of not being able to play the music 'correctly'; once they realised that I was quite happy for them to play it as accurately as they could manage (but not necessarily any more than that), a positive deluge of spirited commitment was unleashed (the fact that **Compilation III** was a studio-based project also enabled me to elicit a much more experimental, reckless, investigative or provocative approach from inexperienced or first-time improvisers; on the understanding that any unsuccessful experiments would never see the light of day, the musicians were much happier to dip a toe into the more extreme areas of their soundworld, both technically and emotionally). As mentioned earlier, I feel that other structuring techniques, such as conducting, game-play, etc, need to have a certain lee-way built in which allows the musician freedom to deviate, if one is to retain the essential benefits of group improvisation.

Before closing this article, there is one approach to large-scale spontaneous music to which I must return; London Skyscraper owes its very being to Butch Morris and his Conduction principle, without which the group would never have been brought together. The resulting music made on our November 1997 tour proved controversial, with many committed improv fans failing to experience the type of music which the stellar line-up had led them to expect. Perhaps this results from a misunderstanding of the highly evolved Conduction system which was applied to the British group: it seems to me that the *Super-Conduction* we experienced actually set out to enable *spontaneous composition by the conductor*. In order to achieve this, Butch has developed a highly complex series of signals to appropriate many of the parameters previously the preserve of notation, and requires *absolute and utter* attention and *immediate* response from the musicians. In the hands of its codifier the system is now sufficiently comprehensive that one is much better served to think about a *solo improvisation by a composer/conductor* rather than a large-scale (directed) improvisation. Butch's rigorous grip on the ensemble's activities means that he improvises with the ensemble's assistance, and many Conductions no longer specifically use musicians with explicit improvisation skills. Listeners expecting or wanting Globe Unity may have been disappointed, but as music which raises (and sometimes answers) many fascinating and crucial questions about the nature of spontaneous creativity and the hierarchical standing of the truly creative ensemble member, it deserves the attention of all those interested in alternatives to the mainstream. And time will tell whether in London Skyscraper Butch's legacy will develop a significant independent life (and British identity) all of its own. **R**

POSTSCRIPT

This is the fourth in a series of essays exploring the implications of attempting to 'organise' improvisation. Interested parties will find previous instalments in **Rubberneck 15, 17 and 24.** London Skyscraper will be performing at The Red Rose Club, Seven Sisters Road, London, on the first Sunday of every month during 1999 (except January and December). Simon H Fell's **Composition No. 30 (Compilation III)** is available from *Bruce's Fingers, 24 Chauntry Road, Haverhill, Suffolk CB9 8BE, England.*

FUTURES PASSED

Prince of Pain

Chris Blackford investigates the strange case of Carlo Gesualdo

Gesualdo, or to give him his full title, Duke Carlo Gesualdo, Prince of Venosa, was probably born in 1564 (though some scholars set the date at 1560 or 61), the second son of Fabrizio II Gesualdo and Girolama Borromeo. The Gesualdos were feudal landowners with a modest castle in the Italian village of Gesualdo (60 miles from Naples), a larger one in the ancient town of Venosa, plus a palace in Naples. While details of Carlo's early life are scarce, it is known that he published a competent motet in 1585; yet, five years later he would become better known, indeed notorious, for his extra-musical activities.

marriage and murder

In 1584, his elder brother died, leaving Carlo with the responsibility of continuing the Gesualdo line. A year later he married (after gaining papal permission) his first cousin Maria d'Avalos who, it seems, within a few years had begun an affair with a young nobleman, the Duke of Andria. Now, Giulio Gesualdo, one of Carlo's uncles, also fancied Maria but his advances were rejected. Consequently, Giulio informed Carlo of his wife's suspicious meetings with the Duke. In what appears to have been a cunningly laid trap, Carlo left Naples on a hunting trip saying he would be away overnight, only to return unexpectedly to catch his wife and the Duke naked in bed *in flagrante delicto.*

The lovers were brutally murdered, if not by

Carlo Gesualdo himself, then certainly by others acting on his instructions. Various reports of this tragic *crime passionnel* claim that the Duke and Maria were both stabbed and shot, that the latter received wounds "in her belly and especially in those parts which most ought to be kept honest", and that Gesualdo, then convinced of the morality of his actions, publicly displayed the corpses. Whatever the exact details of the murders, Gesualdo fled Naples and, presumably because of his aristocratic position, escaped punishment. Guilt and remorse, however, pursued him for the rest of his life, as did the fear of eternal damnation. He died in 1613, by all accounts a miserable, neurotic figure, yet having composed some of the most boldly inventive, complex and idiosyncratic vocal music of the Renaissance.

radical madrigals

If your idea of a 'madrigal' is of a rather staid, old-fashioned vocal entertainment for bourgeois consumption, then think again. Italy, birthplace of the madrigal, witnessed a huge output during the second half of the 16th century, most arranged for four or five voices. Poetic texts used for this music ranged from the epic, philosophical and religious, to the comic, morbid, pastoral and overtly erotic. Some of the genre's

composers who set these texts to music, exploring every subtle nuance of their sentiments with intricate contrapuntal and harmonic invention, spiced with adventurous chromatic twists and unexpected dissonances, were regarded as the avant-gardists of their day. Composers such as the resident Netherlanders, Cipriano de Rore (1516-1565) and Giaches de Wert (1535-1596), as well as home-grown virtuosi like Luca Marenzio (1553-1599) and, most famous of all, Claudio Monteverdi (1567-1643).

Gesualdo was also part of the avant-garde, though unlike the aforementioned composers he had not been cathedral trained in composition, nor was he dependant on employment as a *maestro* of a cathedral or court. Inherited wealth and social position enabled him to explore his own interests without regard for the requirements of a patron or specific audience. These factors, plus a genuinely innovative approach to composition, account for the outlandish and obsessive qualities to be found in his most interesting work.

Ferrarese influence

Nevertheless, Gesualdo did gain valuable insights from the work of other composers, such as his possible teacher in Naples, Pomponio Nenna, and particularly those visiting or based at the forward-thinking northern court of Ferrara. Here he stayed for several years with his second wife, Eleonora d'Este, niece of Alfonso II, Duke of Ferrara; and here he encountered the influential Luzzasco Luzzaschi, composer of chromatic madrigals for the virtuoso female ensemble, the 'Concerto delle Dame', researcher into Greek modes and tuning, and chief exponent of Nicola Vicentino's *archicembalo*, a microtonal harpsichord with split keys and extra notes (Scipione Stella, Gesualdo's court organist, later owned one). The Ferrarese influence on Gesualdo surfaces in his third and fourth books of madrigals for five voices, published in 1595 and 1596; Books 1 and 2, written before his stay in Ferrara, are generally regarded as promising, if somewhat conventional by comparison.

You can hear performances of four madrigals from Book 3 and three from Book 4 on **Carlo Gesualdo/Madrigaux** (Harmonia Mundi HMC 901268 CD, 1988) sung by **Les Arts Florissants** directed by William Christie. Texts and translations are provided — always essential for recordings of madrigals if one is to understand how the voices express the emotional subtleties of individual words and phrases. Gesualdo's choice of texts displays a characteristic obsession with the pain and torment of desire and love; 'death/die' in this context can signify orgasm as well as expiry of life, bringing coital and post-coital significance to other words like 'sigh' and 'languishing'. At this level of interpretation, then, 'Arde il mio cor' can be seen to celebrate sexual passion with its light flurries and sudden peaks and sighs from the soprano, countertenor and tenor voices. Its closing couplet ("O my blissful fate!/O sweet, O strange death!") gently subsides in some wonderfully delicate chromatic harmonies. It has to be said, that alone these poems with their extravagant sentiments soon become rather irksome; and yet, it's this very extravagance that fires up the astonishing scope of Gesualdo's uninhibited musical imagination.

In contrast, and in keeping with its sombre religious text, 'Sparge la morte al mio Signor' adopts a reverential tone, including the final, unambiguous "e spira" ("and dies"). This fine madrigal is closer in style to Gesualdo's more restrained early sacred motet writing, where the vocal lines tend to be less agitated, giving a greater sense of textural unity. Even so, the piece is not without unusual harmonic interest when the voices separate, allowing individual gestures to assert themselves. It's possibly the most moving piece on this disc.

After these middle-period madrigals, **Gesualdo-Madrigaux** includes a selection of later works, published in 1611; three pieces from Book 5 and four from Book 6. These Books, in particular, contain Gesualdo's most radical madrigals, causing some scholars down the ages to question the mental stability of the composer. Even a modern commentator like Howard M Brown (*Music In The Renaissance*, Prentice Hall 1976, p. 362) resorts to the phrase, "close to harmonic chaos", when confronted by the numerous chromatic notes, chords and progressions which populate these later works.

'Asciugate i begli occhi' reeks of morbid self-pity, the line, "Ah, I am the one who should weep,

wretched and alone", declaimed with memorable vehemence in each of its repetitions; ascending higher voices, underlined by dolorous bass, create some fascinating jarring dissonances here. 'Ardo per te, mio bene' recalls 'Arde il mio cor' in its sudden erotic climaxes and fleet moves, again couched in the textual ambiguities of 'dying' and 'languishing', but the most complex structural developments and strangest vocal textures occur in 'Se la mia morte brami' and 'Io parto'. In the former, voices rise out of an almost droning, slow-motion tempo, accentuated by the male singers in their lower registers. Both pieces represent superb examples of Gesualdo's predilection for breaking up the metrical flow of the text into disparate musical events, triggered by particular words or phrases that invite abrupt changes in mood, tempo or dynamics. Phrases like "my soul takes flight" and "I am alive" bring an excitable flurry of semiquavers, whereas a key word like "pain" is sufficient to commence a sequence of dark and anguished chromatic progressions. It's this pervasive sense of restlessness and unpredictability which, when allied to a highly inventive use of chromatic details and dissonances (though chromaticism and dissonance alone are common features of the Italian madrigal tradition) make Gesualdo's madrigals more challenging and *strangely* expressive than the work of any other madrigalist.

This is a magnificent recording by a group of singers who demonstrate a superb attunement to the idiosyncrasies of this visionary composer. They attack the material with obvious relish and confidence that convey its extraordinary qualities; so much so that one has to remind oneself that this music was composed about 400 years ago. There are parts of these works which sound so modern that one could almost be listening to Electric Phoenix singing from their 20th century repertoire, or, dare I say it, a group of improv vocalists.

sacred style

After the vigorous experimentation of the madrigals, Gesualdo's more restrained, so-called "sacred style", can on first hearing seem less interesting. But listen closely and you will be rewarded. His first collection of motets based on religious texts, the *Sacrae Cantiones*, was published in 1603 (between the middle- and late-period madrigals), comprising 19 pieces, most of madrigal length with a few edging towards five minutes. **Oxford Camerata** conducted by Jeremy Summerly present the whole collection on **Gesualdo: Complete Sacred Music For Five Voices** (Naxos 8.550742 CD, 1993) — a bargain price disc with, sadly, bargain price presentation. Summerly's sleevenotes offer brief biography followed by brief comments on the motets; texts and translations are not provided. If, as Denis Arnold suggests (*Gesualdo*, BBC Music Guides, 1984), that Gesualdo's sacred music would have been composed for a small group of monks, one voice taking each part, then it's rather frustrating to find Oxford Camerata's version employing 12 voices instead of the recommended five. While performances are uniformly sensitive, the weight of these additional voices tends to obscure the subtleties of Gesualdo's less forceful chromaticism and dissonances, presenting an expansiveness, even grandeur, where an essentially private, more intimate atmosphere is called for.

reflective

What has been sacrificed becomes emphatically apparent when one hears the five-voice versions of two of these motets on **Gesualdo: Madrigals & Motets From Renaissance Naples** (ASV Quicksilva CD QS 6210 CD, 1997), performed by **Gesualdo Consort** directed by Gerald Place (this disc also offers a rare opportunity to hear works by several of Gesualdo's neglected Neapolitan and Ferrarese associates). 'O vos omnes', the most dissonant and possibly the most beautifully elegiac, receives a sharper focus in the Gesualdo Consort's performance — soprano, mezzo and countertenor voices striking some gorgeous, surprisingly penetrating dissonant chords, which receive a heavier, hazier treatment by the Camerata's larger forces. The Consort's treatment also reveals with greater clarity the heartrending shades of emotion in this exquisite motet and, most importantly, we hear how skilfully Gesualdo adapts, not compromises, the experimental aspects of his writing to suit a context that requires a more reflective, less energetic approach. However,

without another complete recording of the *Sacrae Cantiones* currently available, the Camerata disc should at least be cautiously welcomed.

darkness visible

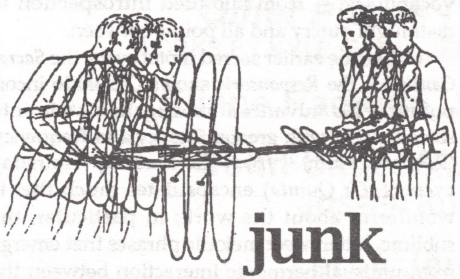
The year 1611 saw the publication of Gesualdo's fifth and sixth Books of madrigals; the same year his last collection of sacred motets was also published. *Responsoria et alia ad Officium Hebdonadae Sanctae spectantia* was composed for the Tenebrae service during Holy Week, when the Christian Church commemorates Christ's betrayal, death and burial on Maundy Thursday, Good Friday and Holy Saturday. Tenebrae means 'darkness'; the darkness of the church building as all but one of its lights are extinguished during the service, and the symbolic growing darkness of the world as 'Christ the Light of the World' is taken from us. It's an atmospheric service, a time of sorrow and solemn ritual. Gesualdo's reasons for setting these 27 responsories, plus a *Benedictus* and *Miserere*, were partly personal. Holy Week's themes of guilt, betrayal and redemption had special significance for him given his responsibility for the murder of his first wife after her infidelity, and this work provided a further opportunity to explore the trauma of his plight. It's this autobiographical undercurrent that heightens the dark atmosphere of the *Responsoria*, giving it a compelling edge as humility (his sincere desire for redemption) becomes entangled with self-pity and perhaps hubris (using Christ's suffering as a metaphor for his own private anguish). There certainly is a depth of feeling here, borne out by the emotional intensity of the music, which counteracts the argument put forward by some scholars that the tortured nature of Gesualdo's music is merely a mannerist pose.

The Hilliard Ensemble rise to the challenge of the *Responsoria* on **Gesualdo: Tenebrae** (ECM New Series 1422/23 843 867-2 2CDs, 1991) demonstrating once again why they are one of the leading vocal ensembles. Their collective cohesion in conveying the myriad harmonic nuances, prominent and understated, of this often peculiar music, is simply breathtaking. Furthermore, they have supreme control of the fluctuating dynamics of Gesualdo's innovative and highly expressive vocabulary — from subdued introspection to distraught outcry and all points between.

Unlike the earlier sacred motet cycle, the *Sacrae Cantiones*, the *Responsoria* shows Gesualdo incorporating his advanced madrigalian style into sacred music with greater fluency and frequency. 'Responsorium 3' from the Maundy Thursday cycle (*Feria Quinta*) encapsulates much that is wonderful about the work; in particular, the sublime, bittersweet melodic phrases that emerge from unusual harmonic interaction between the voices. There are many examples of Gesualdo's lively madrigalian phrasing throughout the work, including 'Responsorium 2' at the phrase "Ye shall take flight"; also, 'Responsorium 2' from the Good Friday cycle (*Feria Sexta*) when describing how the veil of the temple was rent and the graves opened; and in 'Responsorium 1' of the Holy Saturday cycle (*Sabbato Sancto*) at "That He might give life to His people." Particularly affecting is the setting of 'O vos omnes' ('Responsorium 5' from *Sabbato Sancto*) based on melodic material first used in the motet from the *Sacrae Cantiones*. It's perhaps no coincidence that Gesualdo was inspired to write possibly his most poignant melody for this text with its obvious autobiographical resonance ("O all ye that pass by attend and see: If there be any sorrow like unto My sorrow."). The Hilliard Ensemble's performance is especially captivating here, as they communicate the mysterious beauty of the chromatic writing, fading so memorably on that entrancing, sombre cadence "dolor meus".

The *Responsoria* is commonly regarded as Gesualdo's masterpiece, and with an abundance of technical innovation, emotional intensity and subtle shades of tone colour, such as there is here, it's hard to dissent from this conclusion. And you don't need to be religious to enjoy the finer points of this music, just as you don't to enjoy the sacred music of a devout Christian like Messiaen. For sheer idiosyncratic brilliance there's nothing comparable in Renaissance music to Gesualdo's strange, tormented, yet compelling vision. It's high time his extraordinary music was appreciated by many more beyond the relatively small number of Early Music enthusiasts. **R**

Photo, page 28: **Colin Nears** (© BBC)



junk aesthetics

Chris Blackford talks to junk maestro **Martin Klapper** about the art of low-tech electronics and high-brow toyshop manipulation.

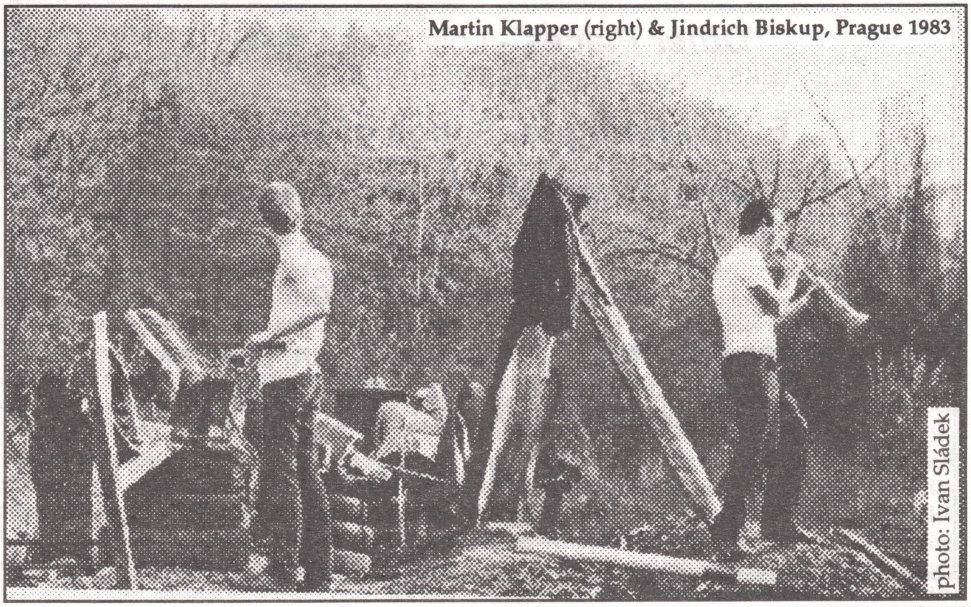
Martin Klapper (born 1963, Prague, former Czechoslovakia) is one of improv's leading exponents of amplified objects, toys and sundry low-grade odds and sods (he is also a visual artist and film maker). If anyone can extract poignancy from a plastic soccer game or a squeaky fish, Klapper can. His latest CD, **Recent Croaks** (Acta), with seasoned British percussionist and fellow junk manipulator, Roger Turner, is a highly inventive masterwork of bizarre resonances and textures. And the secret of its strange, seductive beauty lies in the duo's exceptional, quickwitted timing and close listening.

I understand that you became involved in music by performing in the junkyards of Prague. Could you explain the importance of this period in your development and what attracted you to use junk instruments.

MK I became involved in playing music around 1978 together with a group of friends who shared the same enthusiasm for groups like Mothers Of Invention, Can, Velvet Underground and King Crimson. Also, Stockhausen's *Prozession* (1967) and Music Improvisation Company's LP on ECM (1970) were very influential recordings for me. But this was a difficult time for experimental rock music in Czechoslovakia, as it was just after the big state trial with the underground music community gathered around the group Plastic People Of The Universe. To play concerts in public halls, even for amateur musicians who took no payment, one had to submit a three-page form to the district government committee and to the local police three months in advance before the actual date of the concert. On this official form you had to state every word which would be spoken or sung on stage. Even totally instrumental groups had to state the spoken introductions of the titles of their compositions. The authorities might not allow the concert, and especially in this period they often didn't on the grounds of "unsuitable for socialistic youth" or similar 'reasons'. Even when the concert had been allowed they might suddenly withdraw their permission on the same day as the concert was due to take place.

Rock music was indigestible for the petit-bourgeois mentality of the ruling neo-Stalinistic nobility which came to power after the Warsaw Pact invasion in 1968, and were opposed to "western ideological subversion of the socialistic state". The bitter joke was that they gave their official support to local country & western and traditional and mainstream jazz groups, and to popstars who were singing mostly cover versions of western pop hits.

In this situation the best place to express ourselves seemed this rubbish heap in a valley surrounded by rather wild, romantic nature about 10 minutes walk from our homes. People had been throwing rubbish there for quite a long time, thus there were several layers of waste mingled with earth and vegetation. I found these accidental juxtapositions of different materials and structures very engaging, and this experience certainly had a strong impact on my visual art, music and film making. There was also an array of musical instruments to find. Broken grand pianos, guitars and violins. Yes, we sometimes even got our jeans or leather jackets from there. It was a land of plenty by many means. Generally we tried to get hold of as many musical instruments as possible, which was quite easy as Czechoslovakia had a long tradition in manufacturing musical instruments,



Martin Klapper (right) & Jindrich Biskup, Prague 1983

with a brass orchestra in every village. So there were a lot of instruments available for peanuts in second-hand shops or for free from friends and relatives.

Often this led us to try an unusual set-up of instruments. For example, one of the first groups I was in consisted of glockenspiel, drum, cello, accordion and violin. We incorporated into our performances sculptures made of found junk, not only used as 'stage decoration', but played on and mostly to be set on fire at the end of the event. Also, a moped belonging to one of our friends was used both as a sound source and smoke machine. We had 'festivals' where several groupings shared the programme, and we did 'touring' by invading some other rubbish sites around Prague. This was rather an important period for me as I realised that it was possible to create art with very limited means, using just the things immediately available from the surrounding environment.

Perhaps you could talk about your activities in the hardcore punk group A/64 and also Alfréd Startka.

MK In 1983, I was invited by the bass player Tonda Hlávka, who participated in our rubbish concerts, to join the group A/64 as saxophone player. The name A/64 was taken from a brand of hand cream hardcore punks used to toast on bread in order to get high. At this time, A/64 was the major punk group in Prague, and I was surprised how relatively easy it became for them to get concerts in clubs.

I borrowed a completely broken alto sax from a friend and began a career of aleatoric punk sax playing. I did some rather illustrative sound effects to certain songs, like the sound of a locomotive approaching a suicidal person laying on the tracks, or the screams of a chicken being shot. My favourite bit was the intensive free-noise piece which ended every concert. We often invited extra guests for this piece, and that's how I met Jindrich Biskup, who at this time was sax player with the group Garáz, which played new wave songs composed by Milan Hlavsa, leader of Plastic People, and Mikolás Chadima, who was my idol at the time and the frontman of Rock Jokes Extempore Band and kilhetS.

Jindrich, Mikolás and me decided to form a trio dedicated exclusively to improvised music. We called ourselves Alfréd Startka and began to work with tape loops, so there was still some structure,

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Matt Hutchinson ☐ Marcio Mattos ☐ John Russell ☐ Mark Wastell ☐ Stevie Wishart

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NEW

but later we did several totally improvised concerts. However, Mikolás liked to compose songs, and when I emigrated to Denmark in 1984, he had included Jindrich in his MCH Band playing compositions. I continued to play improvised music with Jindrich when visiting Prague, and finally he joined me in Copenhagen in 1987 after defecting from a Russian cruiser. We have been improvising together ever since.

Did you emigrate to Denmark for cultural and artistic reasons, and what sort of improvising scene did you find there?

MK My emigration had very little to do with my artistic career. I got married to a Danish woman and she didn't want to live in Czechoslovakia, so I followed her to Copenhagen. I didn't know much about Danish modern culture, in fact I only knew about John Tchicai and Arthur K'opcke before going to Denmark.

I quickly became very disillusioned with the Danish arts scene. Generally, Danish art suffers from a lack of originality with very few exceptions. During my first five years in Copenhagen there were only about five gigs of experimental music which interested me. Most Danish improvised music was, and still is, idiomatically based in jazz or rock, and so I've always felt like a total outsider with my affection for the plinkety-plonk style of music. I've mostly developed my music with my compatriot Jindrich Biskup. He began as a saxophone player and, recently because of illness, switched to floor percussion. We were lucky to meet Jeffrey Morgan in 1989, who helped us play abroad as the Summer Assault group. The situation in Copenhagen has improved a lot since the bleak 1980s, and mostly due to organisations like AV-Art and SKRAEP there are now regular events of improvised music. The state funding of concerts and festivals is rather good, but the public interest in this music is close to zero.

Improvisors who play conventional instruments sometimes talk about building up a relationship with their instrument over time. Is this the same for you; are you always in a process of discovering new sounds from your toys/objects, and new ways of playing them?

MK Of course, I am always discovering new sounds from my 'instrumentarium', and I have quite a few things which have 'a life of their own'. Many of the electronic gadgets and toys that I play behave rather strangely when their batteries are just about to run out, so I keep an array of nearly dead batteries to get certain sound effects. There are also endless variations and possibilities in combining amplified objects with each other. The sound changes rapidly when you move one of the items just 1mm, or change the pressure of the finger holding it together. I am often surprised that I am able spontaneously to repeat an exact sound and configuration of the objects. However, there are always a lot of surprises and aleatoric moments which need skill to develop.

What toys, amplified objects, and low-tech electronics are you currently using in your improv performances?

MK I place my instruments into two groups —

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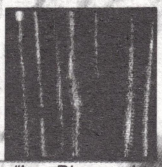

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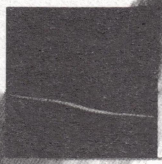

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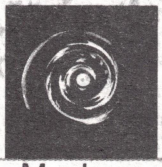

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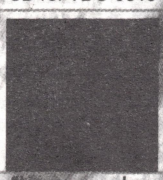

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electronics/amplified objects and toys. In the electronic part I use, among other things, pocket theremin, Hungarian toy synthesizer, a portable plastic gramophone which has the arm divided into three parts, thus producing three different sounds while played by a plastic comb. I also have a bass guitar pick-up on which I place mostly metal objects like egg slicers, springs, and mechanical clockworks. There are nail brushes, small electronic toys, a letter holder which my mum used during her 40 years as a doctor, an amplified plastic soccer game with an array of plastic cups, a telephone amplifier (perfect feedbacker), two Walkmans with variable speed, etc.

In the acoustic section I use various game and bird calls, blown toy instruments, friction drum, squeaky toys, polystyrene, glass, water. I often build or modify these instruments myself.

What do you look for in an object in order for it to be selected as part of your instrumentation?

MK I mostly find new objects for playing rather spontaneously. About seven years ago, I was looking for toys or things having bizarre looks or forms. Lately I just try out things which come my way, and if they have an interesting sound I include them in my selection. A lot of things are given to me by friends or people in the audience. My six year-old daughter gives me toys, too.

I have this terrible habit of watching the pavement while walking in cities new to me, in order to find something useful. Or searching waste containers, not to mention the instant hunt for flea markets. Sadly, I now have a storage space problem in my three-room flat in Copenhagen. I try to cheer myself up thinking that these heaps of assorted junk nowadays have an incredible collectors value. I began collecting things when I was five years-old. My father nicknamed me Plyushkin after the landowner who collected everything in Gogol's novel *Dead Souls*.

Finally, since you're surrounded by all these strange objects which have become your instruments, how important are humour and absurdity in your work?

MK I think there are certainly a lot of humorous and absurd elements in my work but, on the other hand, I would hate to be regarded as a musical clown. I am deadly serious about how I approach my music. Of course, when playing with certain musicians who have a more 'humorous' approach to improvised music, I might throw in some funny visual actions, but I seldom do things just for a funny effect. Everything should serve the sound performance, be an integral part of it. Performances by Roger Turner or Alan Tomlinson come to mind. When you are watching them, it is really funny, but when you close your eyes and just listen to their music, you will find that everything they do is functional to the music, that every gesture is delivered with perfect timing and accuracy. Sadly, I have recently witnessed several 'funny' performances of improvised music which I found rather embarrassing. **R**

Martin Klapper's latest CD is ***Recent Croaks*** *(Acta 11) with percussionist Roger Turner. Acta Records, 28 Aylmer Road, London W12 9LQ.*

SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

Alfréd Startka with Mikolás Chadima (Old Europa Café, Italy, 1985 MC); Jindrich Biskup/Adam Bohman/Nick Couldry/Andy Hammond/Martin Klapper, **Metallurgy** (Polar Bear 002, 1991 MC); Summer Assualt (w Biskup/Jeffrey Morgan), **Char-broiled: Live In Czechoslovakia** (Rachot, Denmark 1992, MC); **SKRAEP 93** (Various Artists) (Tomorrow's Classics TOCD 6001, 1993 CD); Martin Klapper/Jindrich Biskup/Chris Burn/John Butcher, **SKRAEP 2** (Various Artists) (Tomorrow's Classics TOCD 6004, 1994-95 CD); Network (Various), **Volume Two: 54 Music Miniatures** (Discus 5 CD, 1995); Ghost-In-The-Machine/Evan Parker, **Ghost-In-The-Machine/Evan Parker** (Leo Lab CD018, 1996 CD); Martin Klapper/Roger Turner, **Recent Croaks** (Acta 11 CD, 1997)

Prime cuts

Kristoff K Roll, Des travailleurs de la nuit, a L'amie des objets (Metamkine MKCD024 CD)
Lionel Marchetti, La grande vallee (Metamkine MKCD025 CD)
Rune Lindblad, Objekt 2 (Pogus P21014-2 CD)
Arne Nordheim, Electric (Rune Grammofon RCD 2002 CD)

Kristoff K. Roll are that rare thing, a musique concrète duo. To judge from the source material, title and credits of their mini-CD, replete with references to CNT and EZLN, this is what you might call 'acousmatic agitprop', though my French isn't up to deciphering the various dialogues that make up this set of short pieces. Lionel Marchetti's **La grande vallee** is a typically baffling programmatic piece — the title and, I assume, the rubric come from a passage by Chuang-Tzu. Whilst the CD contains no notes, the press release describes how the piece represents the walk of primitive man through the great valley, "guided by a strange-voiced muse." It's haunting, not a little chilling and a narrative piece of some considerable strength.

The electronic compositions of Rune Lindblad and Arne Nordheim were roundly dismissed by contemporary critics in their home countries (Sweden and Norway respectively). With Lindblad I feel I can see why. This second volume of his compositions, spanning the years 1962 to 1988, begins with what resembles a free improvisation on primitive electronics and culminates in the ugly sounds of an 80s polyphonic synth. The lack of sleevenotes does not dispel the feeling that his obscurity is somehow perpetuated by this release: is there really nothing to say about him? By contrast, the Rune Grammofon reissue of Nordheim's electronic work (1967 to 1971) is superbly presented, beautifully packed with a trilingual booklet and gorgeous design standards. There is a remarkable diversity of electroacoustic applications here, from the metallic interplay of electronics, Hammond organ and percussion that is 'Colorazione', to what for me is the finest piece on show — 'Solitaire'. Recalling Nancarrow's dazzling player piano pieces, Nordheim manipulates a recitation of a Baudelaire poem to produce a glittering, virtuosic shimmer of pure sound. A delight. (*Metamkine UK distributor ReR Megacorp / Pogus Productions, PO Box 150022, Van Brunt Station, Brooklyn, NY 11215-0022, USA / Rune Grammofon, Akersgata 7, 0158 Oslo, Norway*)
Chris Atton

The Ivo Perelman Trio, Seeds, Vision And Counterpoint (Leo CD LR 252 CD)
Ivo Perelman with C.T. String Quartet, The Alexander Suite (Leo CD LR 258 CD)
Robert Dick/John Wolf Brennan/Daniele Patumi, Aurealis (Victo CD052 CD)

Ivo Perelman is a man on the move. Here he pits his mighty tenor saxophone against a drum (Jay Rosen) and bass (Dominic Duval) team with a dash of live electronics — putting a contemporary spin on the traditional free jazz trio, and within an interwoven, spiky modernist string quartet named after Cecil Taylor. For all the bluster, Perelman is a wonderfully gifted melodicist, a point which gets overlooked among the comparisons with this or that exponent of Godzillaesque saxophony. So much so, one wonders why he often resorts to squeaky, screechy overblowing. With the string quartet (Duval: bass; Tomas Ulrich: cello; Jason Hwang: violin; Ron Lawrence: viola) Perelman uses the effect to mimic the strings, just as Ayler used to in his coalescence with Michael Sampson and Joel Freedman. On the trio disc Perelman builds effective solos out of his full force high register playing, eschewing the tendency to produce texture alone. He obviously has rocket boosters, but his improvising skills really show themselves in his more lyrical moments, where he seems to have a packed larder of creative stock, and a tasty tone. His most interesting work is to be found on **The Alexander Suite** where his intense balladry and ability to sing songs is more

prevalent. Flit past the easy listening pyrotechnics and cherish the real yearning and passion of Perelman's take on quiet storm.

Dick (flutes), Brennan (piano), and Patumi (bass) play together like one of those classic post-Bill Evans piano trios, where everybody seems to play individually and together at the same time. All three have wide musical biographies and this is reflected in the music which traverses many boundaries, showing (like the title) a constellatory approach to music making. Solos and duos appear; free improvisation alongside written pieces; wispy melodies and dissonances; deep grooves and a-rhythmicism. In keeping with the horrid florid New Age cover, a couple of composed themes are a little twee, but the playing throughout is a delight, so this hardly matters. In particular, Patumi's work with the bow has a palatable strong chocolatey texture. There is also a good shot at some serious non-idiomatic idiomatic improv. But in a matching moment of repose, I would have to say like the Perelman discs, the concordant passages are the most toothsome. (*Leo Records, The Cottage, 6 Anerley Hill, London SE19 2AA / Victo, C. P. 460 Victoriaville, Québec, Canada, G6P 6T3*)

Mark Greenaway

Various Artists, Desde el Otro Lado
(O.O. Discs OO45 CD)
Steve Peters, Emanations
(O.O. Discs OO34 CD)
Transient v Resident, Live 1997 Dharma Day
(Discus DISCUS A-CDR)
Jon Rose, The Fence
(ReR JR5 CD)

If you thought that Latin America specialised in salsa and little else, it'll be refreshing and educational to hear this collection of electroacoustic music from O.O. Discs. Researchers, pioneers and professors of electronic music abound, yet this work is far from academic. Indeed, these artists connect to much that is vital in Latin American culture. Eduardo Reck Miranda's 'Electroacoustic Samba X' is a vibrant update of Brazil's main musical export. 'Chica Aruma' by Nicolas Suarez Eyzaguirre explores the language of the Aymara people of Bolivia. The high points of an excellent collection are Alfredo del Mónaco's 'Syntagma (a)', a marriage of electronics and trombone circa 1972; and 'Ashram' by Ricardo Dal Farra which features the mukha veena (an Indian double-reed instrument) multitracked and processed in a way that allows the improvisational qualities of the instrument full rein.

Steve Peters' **Emanations** is the antithesis of the above. It is completely unvaried, almost complete silence. To be fair, Peters has a concept: "This disc is not a performance — it is not a concert — it is a gentle, soft sound environment for the home that is intended to be heard at very low volume over long durations... a continuous sonic environment." Imagine your TV after the programmes have finished, turned very low, for 72 minutes. It's not a concept I enjoyed, and I don't really see the point of music that is intended as "a pleasant yet unobtrusive accompaniment to one's living."

Chris Bywater and Martin Archer of Transient v Resident have produced a sustained piece of work that succeeds for me where Peters' fails. This live, coherent electronics performance spreads itself languidly over two CD-Rs, and manages to be both listenable and contemplative. There is a dazzling array of textures and approaches here, and although both CDs feature one lengthy track apiece, they are engaging and entertaining. At some points dance and industrial sensibilities emerge. Kept me guessing.

Jon Rose continues to poke his nose into a subject that many avant-garde artists seem reluctant to directly address — politics. This stunning work concerns itself with barriers, from the Golan Heights to Northern Ireland, from Korea to Bosnia-Herzogovina. Rose's own voice is a wryly humorous counterpoint to the harsh, resonant sounds played on a variety of long (some up to 20 metres) string instruments. With the use of radio voices and field recordings he puts across the poignant message that the world is still a divided place, and the fence is still the preferred tool of politicians intent on holding on to power. It's a lot like Germany's 'untergang' of the 1980s. If you ever had time for Einstürzende Neubauten, you should own this CD. (*O.O. Discs, 261 Groovers Avenue, Black Rock, CT 06605-3452, USA / Discus, Box 658, Sheffield S10 3YR, England / ReR, 79 Beulah Road, Thornton Heath, Surrey CR7 8JG, England*)

Jim Barker

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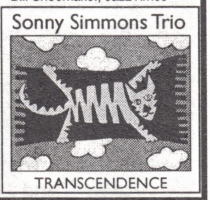

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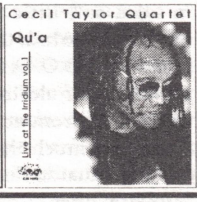

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Cecil Taylor, The Tree Of Life
(FMP CD 98 CD)

Though some composers view the piano as an instrument of infinite resource, most pianists are content to rest their buttocks and tickle the ivories. Not Huber and Brennan. Both men spend quality time under the lid, and their preparations trigger new improvisational possibilities. They also share a preference for neatly encapsulated forms which assemble readily into suites. Brennan is the more florid stylist, but Huber has his moments; 'Triads', for example, with its township rhythm and almost Caribbean lilt. The rhapsodic 'Fluidum' leads to 'Korkelwurz', a free-ranging ostinato of ambiguous tonality which sets off bell clusters in the piano's upper region. Huber bows the strings in 'Clavicello', and a repeated slow-motion arpeggio is garlanded with stray notes. More compositional in his tendencies than Brennan, Huber is a less organic improvisor — perhaps less of an improvisor altogether. **Al Fresco** is nonetheless satisfying.

Brennan plays some numbers straight, but his disc is mostly devoted to prepared piano, sometimes coupled with field recordings. In 'Aldgate East', London Underground sounds and the refrain, "Mind the gap", act as structural determinants. The 'Russian Doors' series involves creaky hinges recorded in... can you guess? Brennan gives each 'Door' an oblique commentary on prepared piano. On 'Prelude' and 'Bow Road' he, yes, bows the strings. Even his most Lilliputian forms contain ideas of substance. Also included is a set from the Sergey Kuryokhin Memorial Concert. Here Brennan stretches out, by his standards; the music simply flows out of him.

A typical Riley solo demonstrates immense technical facility and imagination, and can feel like a brilliant synthesis of the entire history of jazz piano. Jaw-dropping stuff. 'Triplex' and 'Pact' have a Monkish slant, but Riley is a much busier player and the rhythmic displacements are marginally less cliffhangerish. 'Masquerade' is stride piano deranged by Conlon Nancarrow. The ballads are unsentimental yet strangely heartfelt, and nothing seems inappropriate. **Making Notes** may be his best solo disc yet.

'Period 1' of Taylor's excellent 1991 live set is comprised of ritualistic vocal exercises which ought to sound ludicrous but don't. After a thoughtful introduction to 'Period 2', he embarks on the kind of probing, questing marathon we've become accustomed to since **Indent**. His sense of architecture is rarely remarked upon, but in many ways it's the key to his success: he paces and shapes ideas meticulously, and employs much greater contrasts than of yore. 'Period 3' is a scaled down version of the epical 'Period 2', and in two brief afterthoughts material is recapitulated in simplified form. Newcomers to Taylor's soundworld should consider taking the reverse route. (*Creative Works, Ronmatt 2, CH-6037 Root, Switzerland / Unit Records, P.O. Box 1474, CH-8610 Uster, Switzerland / Slam Productions, 3 Thesiger Road, Abingdon OX14 2DX, England / FMP distributed by Cadillac: 0171 278 7391*)

Brian Marley

Mike Keneally & Beer For Dolphins, Sluggo!
(Immune Records IMM 1018 CD)
Howard/Hayward/Frith/Laswell, Meridiem
(Materiali Sonori MASO 90098 CD)
Herb Heinz, Failure
(IS Too Records IST0011 CD)

There is still quality stuff being released in the 'songs' dept. Keneally's **Sluggo!** could be his best record... so far. Beautifully segued, it's the equivalent of the four-sides LP from way back. The usual influences are here (XTC, Gentle Giant, Zappa's rhythmic contraptions), but there is more chordal movement under the solos, and a couple of nods in the Beck (Jeff) direction. Well sung, well played: lots of keyboards (Keneally himself), some great drumming, a criminally proficient bass player (listen to the Entwistle-like run on 'Why Am I Your Guy?'). Sonically detailed, **Sluggo!** even manages to include two homages to 'progressive' that are entirely serious and hysterically funny at the same time.

It's surprising and refreshing to hear Fred Frith and Charles Hayward (always a clear thinker on drums) in a more 'structured' context than usual.

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American Percy Howard sings beautifully, and writes words and music... with a little help from his friends. Some grooves and instrumental passages reminded me of Material (circa **Memory Serves**); not surprisingly, given the presence of Bill Laswell on bass, but a better comparison is, I think, with Malcolm Mooney-era Can. Howard's vocal style has been compared to Stax, and wasn't Mooney a Sam & Dave on acid? Curiously, the last track has the same dynamics as The Doors' 'The End'.

Heinz is, of course, a member of Amy X Neuburg's group (see review in **Rubberneck 24**; where else?). Based on a self-referential concept, this CD sports quirky vocals, tasty guitars, drum machine 'fractured' grooves that never settle for long. Almost-pop to Hammillian climates, **Failure** covers a lot of ground. On first hearing unassuming, an intriguing work that, given time, definitely grows on you. Will **Failure** succeed? (*Immune Records, 9269 Mission Gorge Road 211, San Diego, CA 92071, USA / Materiali Sonori, via Tre Novembre 2, San Giovanni Valdarno, 52027 (AR), Italy / IS Too Records, P.O. Box 3856, Oakland, CA 94609, USA*)
Giuseppe Colli

Eugene Chadbourne And Hellington Country, The Hellingtunes (Intakt CD 052 CD)
Eugene Chadbourne, Insect Attracter (Leo CD LR 256 CD)
Eugene Chadbourne, Volume 2: Solo Acoustic Guitar (Rastascan BFD-032 CD)
Well before the present CD glut in improvised music, Eugene Chadbourne was surely one of the most prolific artists, as anyone who has seen his voluminous sack of cassettes (the KKK Mart) at his solo gigs will testify. Here are three more releases for the Chadbourne completist, but how can the more modest pocket choose? **The Hellingtunes** collection is Chadbourne's selection of cut-up Ellington and Ellington-inspired charts, peppered with much improvisation. There are bravura performances from Pat Thomas and Alex Ward, yet the relentless ironic riffing does become exhausting. The one piece not based on Ellington is 'The Cricket In My Life' (spot the Feldman reference), part of Chadbourne's "major work in progress", *Insect And Western*. **Insect Attracter** (sic) offers more of this work, including two further versions of 'Cricket' (we now have 40 minutes of this piece). This collection is very uneven. 'Termite Damage' is a noisy sprawl, not even saved by the presence of the oft-inspired Shaking Ray Levis. The 20-minute opener 'Mourning Of The Praying Mantis', on the other hand, is a classic Chadbourne 'open composition', where a series of laconic, spacious solo improvisations are underpinned by a skewed banjo ostinato (perhaps).

The qualities of this piece recall Chadbourne's early work for small groups on such Parachute releases as **School** and **Guitar Trios**. It's heartening, therefore, to find Rastascan's inspired reissue of a long-lost item from that catalogue, Chadbourne's superb second album of guitar solos of 20 years back. Remastered carefully by Gino Robair of Rastascan in close collaboration with the man himself, who has added an extra 25 minutes of contemporary improvisations (**Volume 1** won't be reissued, I believe, due to loss of master tapes and Chadbourne's preference for the playing and recording quality of **Volume 2**). The ugly compression of the vinyl release is gone, and there is a marvellous clarity that brings out Chadbourne's virtuosity even at this early stage in his career; the humour throughout is poised and careful, not as crass as on some of his later electric releases. Buy this one. (*Intakt Records, P.O. Box 468, CH 8024 Zürich, Switzerland / Rastascan, P.O. Box 3073, San Leandro, CA 94578-3073, USA*)
Chris Atton

Forever Einstein, One Thing After Another (Cuneiform Rune 106 CD)
Elliott Sharp: Tectonics, Field & Stream (Knitting Factory KFR-227 CD)
Donald Miller & Michael J. Schumacher, Flood (Warpodisc VYD04 CD)
Small Things, Keep Calm And Dig (Infinite Chug CHUG 8 CD)
Forever Einstein are one of those bands that bring a lot of other bands to mind. This guitar/drum/bass trio of C. W. Vrtacek, John Roulat and Jack Vees respectively, claim King Crimson and Satie as influences, but I also heard Meat Puppets, Minutemen, October Faction and Laughing Clowns in this quirky mix. These three use shifts in tempo and genre, switching between loungecore, surf, country/bluegrass and jazz

without pause for breath. Tightly structured and humorous, this "power trio with smarts" have created a good mix of art-rock and punk. Well worth checking out.

Elliott Sharp has a big back catalogue I'm not familiar with, and on the strength of this lacklustre outing I'm not compelled to catch up with it. Sharp's tack is to marry his experiments with guitar to the dance techniques of drum 'n' bass. For me, this conjures up images of Laswellesque noodling fusion. Unfortunately, this is pretty much the case, Sharp doesn't so much do it wrong, as start out from a bad idea. Drum 'n' bass is primarily dance music, and guitar experimentation is primarily not. What do you get when you mix them together? All the innate irritations of dance music with none of the danceability, and often interesting (often bland) guitar sounds that are hidden beneath a tacked-on veil of drum breaks. An unhappy marriage.

Flood is another album that's gone up a cul-de-sac. Miller and Schumacher both have strong pedigrees, Miller with Borbetomagus and Schumacher as a composer of electronic music, yet this work is far from ground-breaking, and very close to workmanlike. Here Miller and Schumacher strip the guitar of all accompaniment and engage in drones, distortion and general drawn-out noise, that goes on way too long. This kind of stuff is getting really old, and I personally find it both irritating and boring — not a productive combination. Too much noise, too little imagination. Too easy.

Andru Clare's reputation is fast growing, both as part of the excellent XIII Ghosts and head of the Infinite Chug label. **Keep Calm And Dig** is essentially a solo album — Clare plays drums and other instruments on most tracks — and is probably the best thing he's done so far. Clare's guitar playing is what may be termed 'naive rock', as he constantly comes close to playing 'properly', but never quite does. This makes the music highly listenable and very charming. Unlike Sonic Youth, Clare's detuned guitar simply sounds out of tune, yet this lo-fi master with hi-fi production values has created a truly shimmering and off-kilter album with some excellent moments. An in-figure in out-rock. (*Cuneiform Records, P.O. Box 8427, Silver Spring, MD 20907-8427, USA / Knitting Factory Records, 74 Leonard Street, New York, NY 10013, USA / Warpodisc, Box 3491, Newport, RI 02840, USA / Infinite Chug, 14 Worcester Close, Langdon Hills, Essex, SS16 6TW, England*)
Jim Barker

Mark Dresser, Banquet
(Tzadik TZ 7027 CD)
Morgan Guberman, Hamadryas Baboon
(Pax Recordings PR 90246 CD)
Hughscore, Highspotparadox
(Tim Kerr Records TK109-2 CD)

Three faces of the bass. Mark Dresser needs no introduction. **Invocation**, for solo bass and tape manipulation, was the last record by Dresser that I had listened to; **Banquet** is a totally different proposition — a long, notated piece in four movements for two violins, viola, cello and contrabass, plus the stunning Swiss flute virtuoso Matthias Ziegler. And, as a piece of notated music **Banquet** totally succeeds. Of course, Ziegler's flutes, from contrabass to piccolo, acoustic and amplified, all sonically fresh, are a big part of its charm. But it's the piece as a whole that works brilliantly with ever-changing textures, beautiful (but never 'pretty') melodic development, and a few improvised solo spots that are seamlessly incorporated into the big picture. The final composition, for clarinet, cello and tuba, adds variety without disrupting the mood.

Don't know much about Morgan Guberman, an emerging composer/improvisor based in Oakland, California. If this is his first CD, then it's more a promise of things to come than a big achievement in itself. I like solo bass works, and I'm a bit partial to this one. There's substance in the first six tracks which, to me, sound improvised from a 'thematic' core. Guberman is at his best when playing harmonics with the bow (*flautando*?), but I could have done without the last two tracks for bass and female vocalist.

Hugh Hopper is one of my favourite composers — not to mention bass players! However, I was disappointed by **Caveman Hughscore**, his collaboration with American group Caveman Shoestore. All the right ingredients were there: Hopper's tunes, good interplay, fine vocals, lots (and I mean lots) of basses — forwards, backwards, double-speed, etc. The latest line-up, called

Hughscore (confused by the names, yet?), features a different drummer, Will Dowd, the same charming, understated vocals and keyboards of Elaine di Falco, Fred Chalenor's basses, a few tasty horns, and Hopper himself. **Highspotparadox**, produced by Wayne Horvitz, is a noticeable improvement. Music with a history (think Soft Machine **Two** and **Fourth**, and Hopper's **Hoppertunity Box**) which still sounds fresh. A must for bass players; required listening for everybody else. *(Tzadik, 61 East Eight Street, Suite 126, New York, NY 10003, USA / Pax Recordings, P.O. Box 697, Pacific Grove, CA 93950, USA / Tim Kerr Records, P.O. Box 42423, Portland, OR 97242, USA)*
Giuseppe Colli

Leroy Jenkins, Solo
(Lovely Music LCD 3061 CD)
Gianni Gebbia, H Portraits
(Rastascan BRD 037 CD)
François Cotinaud, Loco Solo
(Musivi MJB 006 CD)
Paul Hession, Giant Soft Drum Set
(Polkaville P-Ville 001 CD)
Leroy Jenkins' sinewy lines and bluesy scrubbing are best heard in a small group context or, as here, solo. He likes to test an idea thoroughly before moving on, which often isn't possible in an ensemble setting. **Solo** is a concert recording, minus applause. When the audience gets to show its appreciation, following a harmonically detailed exploration of 'Giant Steps', they really let rip. Jenkins' elastic phrasing pushes the envelope, and he teases our expectations about colour and pitch (classically-trained violinists who don't understand his method may think he has lousy technique). 'Dive For The Oyster, Dip For The Pearl' is an experimentalist's square dance, and 'Big Wood', one of two viola solos, shows how phrases can be broken down into rhythmelodic cells and reassembled altogether differently. Great stuff.

In his titles and track dedications, Italian Gianni Gebbia has taken a leaf out of Steve Lacy's book. The debt extends no further than that; on soprano sax he sounds nothing like Lacy. But most of the music on **H Portraits** (dedications to scientists, artists, etc, whose surnames begin with H) features alto, and a pantheon of extended techniques. He avoids the flashiness that can mar such effortful displays, and makes sweet and searching music on every track. One of the best CDs of its kind.

François Cotinaud is at heart a melodist, happiest playing around with a tune. He tends to take several bites at an idea before finding enough to chew on: there are four tiny, punning impromptus on Beethoven's 'Ode To Joy', and a couple of equally brief 'Loco' solos. He plays his instruments — tenor and soprano saxes — with equal facility but without a surfeit of character. When he embarks on three lengthier excursions based on Berio's 'Sequenza IX', you gain a better idea of his range and potential; but some of the edginess and physical drama of Berio's composition are missing.

After unfettered melodies, some non-tempered solo music. In pell-mell trio with Alan Wilkinson and Simon Fell, the subtleties of Paul Hession's polyrhythmic clatter can get lost. As 'Hession/Session... a clue to pronunciation' makes clear, his kitwork is top-notch. The skittering flurries on 'Nice Tight Tomatoes' are cleanly articulated, and he knows how to pace the material and frame a composition. 'Giant Soft Drum Set' demonstrates his long haul versatility, and two timpani tracks (one with gong) allow him to play effectively with pitch. The CD is short at 38 minutes, but not a minute is wasted. *(Lovely Music, 10 Beach Street, New York, NY 10013, USA / Musivi, 105 Avenue du Belvédère, 93310, Le Pré Saint-Gervais, France / Polkaville, Suite Five, Whingate Business Park, Whingate, Leeds LS12 3BP, England)*
Brian Marley

Biggi Vinkeloe/Barre Phillips/Peeter Uuskyla, One Way Out (Slask Records SLACD018 CD)
Elton Dean/Mark Sanders/Roberto Bellatalla, Into The Nierika (Blueprint BP292 CD)
Harrison Smith Quartet with Liam Noble, Jeremy Brown, Winston Clifford, Outside Inside
(Slam CD231 CD)
It seems to me that free improvisors fall into two loose categories; those who strive for distinctive individuality and those who are content to borrow from a pool of existing language. Swedish saxophonist Vinkeloe is of the latter variety. She utilises a language that is unashamedly derivative, however it is employed with a distinctive feel and appropriateness that is perhaps missing in many

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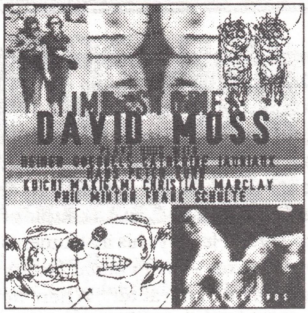

David Moss

Time Stories

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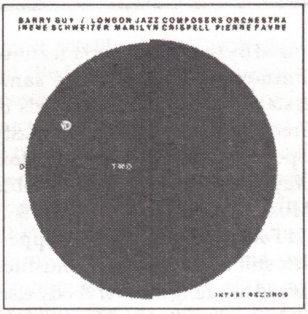

Barry Guy LJCO

Double Trouble Two

Guests:
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Marilyn Crispell
Pierre Favre

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Eugene Chadbourne

Hellington Country

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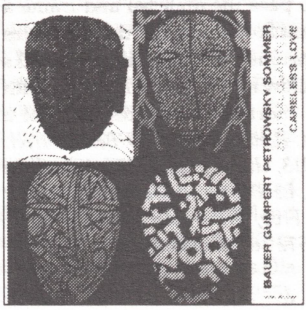

Zentralquartet

Careless Love

Conrad Bauer
Ulrich Gumpert
Ernst-Ludwig Petrwsky
Günter Sommer

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Soufflés

Pierre Favre
Michel Godard
Lucas Niggli
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Les Diaboliques

Splitting Image

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Maggie Nicols
Irène Schweizer

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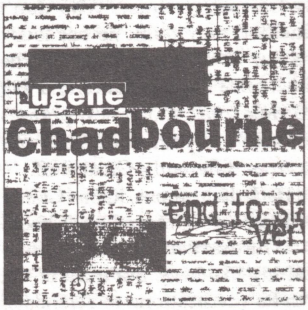

Eugene Chadbourne

End To Slavery

Eugene Chadbourne

INTAKT CD 047

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of those she seeks to imitate. If this seems to be a criticism, it is not meant as such; there has always been a dichotomy between language and process in free improvisation. Whatever language is employed, improvisation cannot be interesting unless improvisors understand how to interact with each other. This series of miniatures and one longer piece show three musicians who are completely in tune with each other's approach. This recording acts like a masterclass on how interactive group improvisation can work.

Dean usually personifies the individual voice in free improvisation, however on this occasion the influence of Ornette Coleman, more than is usual, is apparent in his playing. Bellatalla and Sanders are, as usual, the ideal accompanists, giving support to the altoist and entering into musical dialogue when the opportunity presents itself. This, however, is a soloist's record and Dean does not disappoint. He demonstrates a remarkably fluid technical facility allied to a rich melodic and rhythmic imagination, which makes this record constantly fascinating.

The fine saxophonist Harrison Smith may be unfamiliar to some readers. Unlike Dean, he is rarely heard on record and not often heard in public. His work with District Six and the Free Jazz Quartet perhaps present him at his best — Coltrane inspired but not falling into the trap of imitation. This present CD is, however, something of a disappointment. Coltrane's inspiration is still apparent but he fails to take the music to anything like the heights of his earlier work. The band he has chosen comprises equally fine musicians but their playing is too controlled and lacks the necessary sense of adventure that perhaps he needs to really shine. What is presented is a selection of competent jazz tunes, well played but ultimately unsatisfying. (*Slask Records, Box 27, SE-430 84 Styrsö, Sweden / Blueprint, P.O. Box 50, Houghton-le-Spring, Tyne and Wear DH4 5YP, England*)
Bruce Coates

Gorge Trio, Dead Chicken Fear No Knife (Free Land Records FREE005 CD)
Kazuhisa/Reichel, King Pawns (Zenbei Record ZEN 006 CD)
There is life in the structured/improvised/noise 'rock' fields beyond the ubiquitous Thurston Moore. Take, for instance, Gorge Trio: two guitars and drums from Minneapolis — basically Colossamite without the singer, but playing a different kind of music. If the frame of reference is what is usually referred to as 'math-rock' (!), the Trio's CD is less pretentious and more effective for it. All in their early 20s, the real find here is drummer Chad Popple, who's agile, inventive, propulsive. A natural colourist, he lacks the somewhat self-conscious bravura manners of Doug Sharin (June Of 44) and the tacky Cobhamisms of Don Caballero's Damon Che. Variety, minimum overdubbing, some treatments. Wonder what they'll do next.

The guitarists in Gorge Trio should add **King Pawns** to their record collection. Guitarists Uchihashi Kazuhisa (Altered States, Ground Zero) and Hans Reichel have spent countless years refining their peculiar take on improvisation. Here, they go back to the Big Apple where they recorded a long, explosive duo piece (released on **Stop Complaining/Sundown**, FMP 191). On **Sundown** their styles were complementary but different, Kazuhisa bringing the most apparent 'rock' elements; his scope has widened, and so the 15 pieces on **King Pawns** offer variety, humour, and a more realised match. Stunning. (*Free Land Records UK distributor is Cargo / Zenbei Record, e-mail: bonbon@ro.bekkoame.ne.jp*)
Giuseppe Colli

Cecil Taylor Quartet with Harri Sjöström, Dominic Duvall & Jackson Krall, Qu'a — Live At The Iridium Vol. 1 (Cadence Jazz Records CJR 1092 CD)
Frode Gjerstad Quartet with Bobby Bradford, Wilber Morris & Newman Baker, Through The Woods (Creative Improvised Music Projects CIMP #159 CD)
Hans Burgener/Richard Teitelbaum/Günter Müller, Shift (For 4 Ears Records CD 928 CD)
Complex rhythm and gesture have always been essential tools of the free improvisor, often being emphasised in order to make up for the absence of formal harmonic and melodic material. No improvisor has utilised these tools in quite the way Cecil Taylor has. In 1956 with his recording of 'Bemsha Swing' it was clear that he was taking on Monk's rhythmic mantle, and although his work

has grown progressively abstract, this fundamental percussive approach has remained central to it. This recording reflects this development but also shows a Taylor perhaps more at home with melody and a more traditional approach to the keyboard than has been apparent for some time. Some recent recordings of Taylor have seen him dominate an ensemble but there is none of this here and the interaction of the players is of the highest calibre. Of particular note is saxophonist Sjöström, who provides the perfect melodic foil to Taylor's rhythmic invention.

Rhythm of a different sort pervades Gjerstad's ensemble. Improvisors are not averse to including fragments of melody, particularly as starting points for their work, but it's less usual for them to keep to solid pulse and repetitive accompanying figures as they do here. In this respect the recording is reminiscent of Ornette Coleman's early work (there is a Coleman-like feeling to the 'tunes', too), but it also recalls military music, particularly in Bradford's use of bugle-like figures and Baker's tight drum-rolls. This approach to improvisation lends the music a certain cohesion but it can also make it feel stilted at times. This aside, this is improvisation of a high calibre, demonstrating that there is still room for more traditional approaches within the form.

Burgener, Teitelbaum and Müller initially take a more textural approach to improvisation. Occasional moments of pulsed material from electronic drums contrast with a strange evocative soundworld produced by the combination of electronics, samples and violin extended techniques. These free-flowing areas are often very beautiful and are perhaps the most satisfying and original part of the work. However, when the musicians resort to a more traditional free improvising language the results are somewhat less satisfying and are certainly less surprising. (*For 4 Ears Records, Steinechtweg 16, CH-4452 Itingen, Switzerland / Creative Improvised Music Projects & Cadence Jazz Records, The Cadence Building, Redwood, New York 13679, USA*)

Bruce Coates

The Fonda/Stevens Group, Evolution
(Leo CD LR 260 CD)
The Fonda/Stevens Group, Live From Brugge
(De Werf WERF 010 CD)
Sorgen-Rust-Stevens Trio, Novella
(Leo CD LR 253)

Michel Jefry Stevens on piano, Joe Fonda on bass and Harvey Sorgen on drums were (are?) half of the Mosaic Sextet fronted by Dave Douglas. With Douglas having more and more calls on his time, they are finding other outlets for their creativity. All three of these CDs feature Stevens and Sorgen. Curiously, both recordings by the Fonda/Stevens Group date from the same gig — 25 April 1997 at DeWert, Brugge. The two CDs do not overlap at all, and are best regarded as companion pieces that provide a fuller impression of the group in concert. Although the group's basic currency is straightforward modern jazz, there is a lot of variety in the music here, from the funereal pace and atmospheric impressionism of 'The River', to the good-time chanting and crowd pleasing of 'Down To The Delta', to the in-the-tradition jazz tribute of 'Strayhorn'. Fonda and Stevens are the leaders and write all the group's material, but it is Mark Whitecage's alto sax and clarinet and Herb Robertson's trumpet and cornet that grab the ear. As a long time fan of Robertson (from his work with Tim Berne, in particular) I was delighted to hear his uninhibited, free-wheeling playing again; he can bring a rare sense of joy and excitement to his playing — as well as one of barely contained insanity and anarchy. Whitecage does not have the crazed edge of Robertson, but he is a fine craftsman, most evidently on the Strayhorn tribute (which evokes memories of another tribute, 'Goodbye Pork Pie Hat' by Charles Mingus, as well as of Strayhorn's own 'Blood Count'). The pairing of Robertson and Whitecage is a success, their playing styles complementing each other well. Two fine CDs from a fine quintet.

By comparison, the Trio album is freer with far more collectively improvised passages. Piano, bass and drums play equal roles. Sorgen and Stevens are barely recognisable as the same players in this context. The three players (joined by Todd Reynolds on violin for three tracks) do not have the same attack and drive as the five. This is low-key, chamber improv. There are prolonged periods of barely audible playing — quiet enough for me to check my equipment — which dissipate any energy or sense of continuity. Most

incongruous is the closing track, 'Over Lunch With Ra', on which Stevens plays Hammond organ rather than piano; he sets up a grooving riff which brings the album to a barnstorming conclusion — completely at odds with what has gone before! (*De Werf, Werfstraat 108, 8000 Brugge, Belgium*)
John Eyles

NRG Ensemble, Bejazzo Gets A Facelift (Atavistic ALP73 CD)
The Vandermark 5, Target Or Flag (Atavistic ALP106 CD)
Joe Morris, Ken Vandermark, Hans Poppel, Like Rays (Knitting Factory Records KFR-224 CD)
Despite his allegedly dictatorial hold, it must be partly to the credit of Hal Russell that the band he formed in the late 1970s is going strong six years after his death; still a creative unit rather than a vehicle for nostalgia. All of the NRG players here worked with Russell — some for years — though not with the kind of exclusive dedication demanded by Sun Ra. Without him, much of the humour has gone from the music but the raw and exuberant blend of neat compositional techniques and free jazz remains; along with its sense of cosmopolitan downtown sleaze and Chicagoan bluster and swagger. It is the virtuoso rhythm section of Kent Kessler (bass) and long-serving band members Brian Sandstrom (bass, guitar and trumpet) and Steve Hunt (tuned percussion and drums) that give the band its unique voice, though Ken Vandermark and current bandleader Mars Williams also deserve mention. A new departure here is the introduction of taut improvisations amidst the more upfront energy of the composed pieces. It's a mix that works well.

Vandermark was one of Russell's last recruits and his own quintet shares three members with NRG. Unsurprisingly, therefore, it also shares many of its qualities, not least compositional devices. But here the crooked rhythms and suitably oblique phrasing from the leader are in the context of simpler and cleaner arrangements, though Jeb Bishop (trombone and guitar) does a lot to dirty up the proceedings. The players in both these bands have all been involved in rock, funk, soul or r&b, bringing back energy to keep the true spirit of jazz alive in a way that its new conservatives fail to do.

Guitarist Joe Morris seemed to burst upon the scene in the last few years — a truly original player, best known in this country for his Leo albums and work with the Maneris. Like Bailey, he eschews the use of effects, bringing influences of West African music along with the outer limits of jazz to his work. **Like Rays** finds him in a totally improvised setting in the company of Vandermark (clarinets) and Hans Poppel (piano). A conversational, almost casual, album it lacks the intensity one associates with him, though there are some wonderful moments. (*Atavistic, P.O. Box 578266, Chicago IL 60657, USA*)
Gus Garside

Anthony Braxton/Lauren Newton, Composition 192 (Leo CD LR 251 CD)
Thomas Buckner, Inner Journey (Lovely Music LCD 3023 CD)
Billy Jenkins, True Love Collection (Babel BDV 9821 CD)
Eve Packer & Noah Howard Trio, West Frm 42nd (Altsax Records 9008 CD)
Ah, the human voice. What a wonderfully versatile instrument it is! The only common thread here is that all four of these CDs feature voice. Between them, they demonstrate how diverse (and perverse) vocal music can be. Anthony Braxton's 'Composition 192' is one of his so-called Ghost Trance Musics. As Braxton himself has said of them: "The Ghost Trance Musics are a continuous state music. Each composition becomes like a melody that doesn't start or end. There is no development in this music and it has nothing to do with tonality." Hence the name. Listened to for long enough, this music can induce a trance-like state! At 62 minutes this CD is only a fifth to a quarter of the whole composition. Unlike other recorded examples of the form, 'Composition 192' features a voice. Newton sings (random?) letters of the alphabet and numbers accompanied by Braxton's saxes. This recording dates from a performance which included a giant video screen projecting a film shot through a car windscreen. Like some other recent Braxton, it is hard to adequately judge it away from its performance environment.

Thomas Buckner's album is a strange mix. American Buckner has an operatic baritone, and

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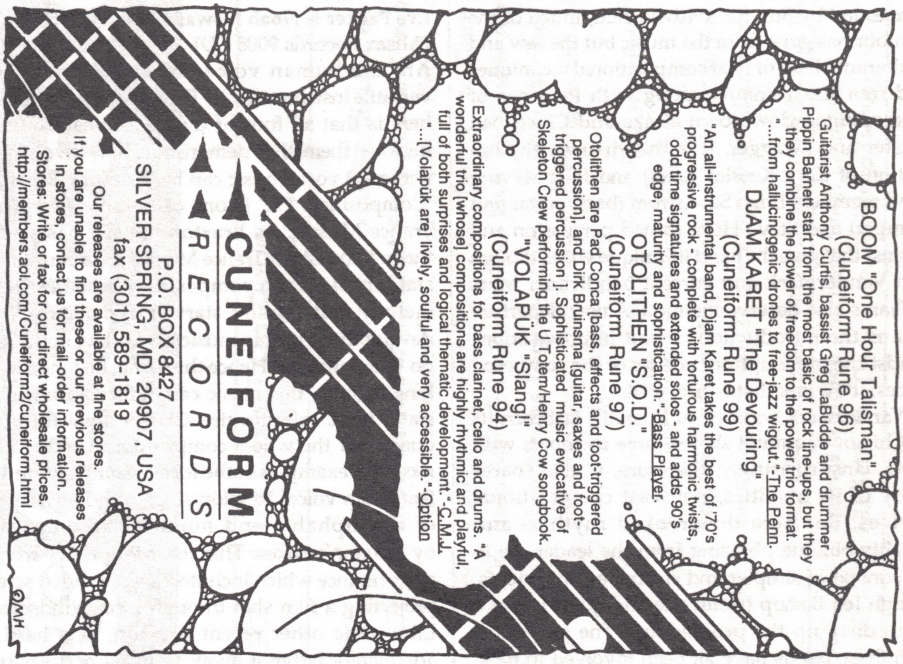
BOOM "One Hour Talisman"
(Cuneiform Rune 96)
Guitarist Anthony Curtis, bassist Greg LaBudde and drummer Pippin Barnett start from the most basic of rock line-ups, but they they combine the power of freedom to the power trio format. "...from hallucinogenic drones to free-jazz wigout."-The Penn.
DJAM KARET "The Devouring"
(Cuneiform Rune 99)
"An all-instrumental band, Djam Karet takes the best of '70's progressive rock - complete with torturous harmonic twists, odd time signatures and extended solos - and adds 90's edge, maturity and sophistication."-Bass Player.
OTOLITHEN "S.O.D."
(Cuneiform Rune 97)
Otolithen are Pad Conca [bass, effects and foot-triggered percussion], and Dirk Bruinsma [guitar, saxes and foot-triggered percussion]. Sophisticated music evocative of Skeleton Crew performing the U Totem/Henry Cow songbook.
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the first 10 tracks form a song cycle that (to my ears) is indistinguishable from classical versions of the form. After that, things get more experimental, with the title track being a free improvisation that uses all manner of vocal effects besides singing. Then, 'A Distant Harmony' is based on a popular song composed by Prince Sihanouk of Cambodia (!), and 'Situations I' is based on "software-based situations"; in other words, a computer composition. Taken together, this all makes for an interesting album but one that is too diverse to be wholly satisfying.

Billy Jenkins bids for pop stardom! Anyone who has seen Jenkins perform will not be surprised by this album. Despite his manic edge, he is more ironical than satirical, with a sentimental streak a mile wide. **True Love Collection** features such songs as 'Mellow Yellow' and 'Feeling Groovy', linked by short instrumental bridging passages. Bet you never thought you'd see *those* songs reviewed in **Rubberneck**. Using a familiar Babel repertory company of players such as Iain Ballamy, Django Bates and Christine Tobin, Jenkins produces a stunning package full of surprises that brings the best out of everyone. It displays genuine affection for the songs whilst transcending them. Tobin's vocal contributions are wonderfully soulful. Jenkins is no match for her as a singer, but milks each song for every ounce of emotion and pathos. Come on Babel, release 'How Deep Is Your Love' as a single. Billy Jenkins for TOTP.

Eve Packer is a New York actress, performance artist and poet. Her poetry has a hard-edged, up-from-the-street quality that does not make it easy to listen to, but does make it compelling and hard to ignore. Her delivery can be rather languid, making an interesting contrast with the gritty content. Noah Howard, Wilber Morris and Calyer Duncan provide sympathetic accompaniment that swings gently and melodically, without detracting from the vocal performance. (*Altsax c/o 78 Bank Street, Apt. 17, New York, NY 10014, USA / Babel, 18 West Hill Park, London N6 6ND*)
John Eyles

Lol Coxhill, Lol Coxhill On Ogun
(Ogun Recordings OGCD 008 CD)
Lol Coxhill & Veryan Weston, Boundless
(Emanem 4021 CD)
George Haslam/Vladimir Solyanik/Ruben Ferrero, Duos East West (Slam CD309 CD)

Joy Of Paranoia (1978) and **Divers** (1977) are jointly released here on CD as **Coxhill On Ogun**. Together they offer an overview of one of the most original and distinctive saxophonists around. **Joy** kicks off with a reminder that his roots were as much in r&b and blues as in jazz, although it's a more fragile and open-ended affair than his commercial sessions with the likes of Rufus Thomas, Screamin' Jay Hawkins or Otis Spann. Then comes free improv with Veryan Weston, two wonderful deconstructions of standards with Michael Garrick and a multitracked sax quartet. Great stuff, but even better is the totally improvised **Divers**. One long slippery rumination is followed by a more eventful group offering where the slightest nudge has our man flying.

The duo with Veryan Weston is expanded and updated on **Boundless** (1998). Good production highlights the clarity of ideas, sense of space and the unhurried quality of the music. These two have worked together for two decades now and the ability to follow each other's changes of direction makes for fascinating listening. A sense of quiet lyricism prevails and the constant invention and confidence of Coxhill's vibratoless and slurred delivery, and Weston's capacity for precise harmonic and rhythmic extension, make this yet another fine one from the estimable Emanem.

Baritone sax player George Haslam combines his love of travelling and playing on **Duos East West**, collaborating with two pianists — Vladimir Solyanik (Ukraine) and Ruben Ferrero (Argentina). Haslam has had very successful duos with pianists, including Howard Riley, Mal Waldron, Joachim Kuhn and Jasper van't Hof. Here the music is presented as a kind of cross-cultural encounter and therein lies a problem. It is difficult, though not impossible, to meet people who mix strong cultural identity with open improvising. But Solyanik plays very much in the American jazz tradition — barrelhouse style — and the spirit of adventure is missing. Ferrero has a strong sense of his own identity and here it's Haslam who finds it hard to get inside it. Nevertheless, there is plenty of fine music in the second half of this album, and it lifts notably on the final track with the addition

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Gus Garside

Pepa Päivinen, Saxigon
(Strawberry Records SBCD 030 CD)
The Billy Tipton Memorial Saxophone Quartet & Ne Zhdali, Pollo D'Oro
(No Man's Land NML 9824 CD)
Pierre Tanguay & Tom Walsh, Midi Tapant
(Ambiances Magnétiques AM053 CD)
René Lussier & Pierre Tanguay, La Vie Qui Bat: Chevreuil (Ambiances Magnétiques AM049 CD)
It's almost five years now since the last direct communication from Edward Vesala's thoroughly idiosyncratic group Sound & Fury, which is far too long for those of us who rate it as one of the finest ensembles in European jazz. **Saxigon** is a message delivered by proxy which, like a similar project, Jimi Sumen's **Paintbrush, Rock Penstemon**, contains only Vesala compositions played by members of Sound & Fury; in **Saxigon**'s case a very reduced group with Vesala, Sumen, Päivinen and the sublime Iro Haarlo. The music they play is never once predictable because of their fleet approach to structure, passing the main focus between them so that background becomes foreground and is then repositioned. Contradiction is central to their scheme: there's a dispersed loose flow of concentrated information, a vague directness, a stillness of passion that brings to mind Wallace Stevens' reference to "Half colours of quarter things". There is an elusive uneasiness at the heart of this music which makes it all the more intriguing and which, on the final track 'Phenomena', finally breaks loose with Iro Haarlo on organ piling up great washes of colour which are dramatically intensified by the other three, but especially by Sumen's post-Hendrix guitar.

Seeing the members of Sound & Fury play adds much to an understanding of their music. It is also hugely enjoyable as it would be, I'm quite sure, to see the musicians who play on **Pollo D'Oro**, a meeting of four female saxophonists from Seattle with a manic avant-rock group from Estonia. Together they have a terrific time and make music which is gleeful and often very funny, but stands repeated listening. There's lots of genre-hopping, clunky rhythms, Morricone-like melodies, Carlo Actis Dato-style playfulness, unrestrained exuberance and a lovely oh-so-sad song sung by Leonid Soybelman, who sounds like an even more melancholy than usual Arto Lindsay. When the women join him in the chorus they achieve a genuine, surprising beauty. The arrangements are quite tight and the only pity is that there's so little improvisation from the BTMSQ, but as the translated press release says, "Where usually power is getting measured and muscles are getting rubbed, the Tiptons' music is cheekily playing about their intentions", a statement which captures perfectly the bizarre spirit at work on this joyous recording.

There's not much humour on **Midi Tapant**, but a good deal of pleasure in invention is clear. Constructing assemblages of incoherent voices, train sounds, a music box, radio tuning (bringing AMM to mind), jangling percussion met by foghorn blasts of trombone, they guide us on a meandering, languid journey. But, like the natural world they sometimes evoke, their sounds are always alive with intent.

Nature is also a resource for Lussier and Tanguay but unfortunately the results are not as compelling. Once is enough to hear the three songs (although anyone who attacks factory farming deserves some praise) and it is good too, to hear Lussier having a try at playing Hans Reichel's daxophone, however limited the results. It is that feeling of their ideas being underdeveloped that eventually pervades the whole CD as track after track goes by with little of consequence occurring. (*No Man's Land, Strassmanstr. 33, D-10249 Berlin, Germany / Ambiances Magnétiques, 4580 Avenue De Lorimier, Montreal, Quebec, Canada H2H 2B5*)
Declan O'Driscoll

Recent Large-scale Improv

Spontaneous Music Orchestra, For You To Share (Emanem 4023 CD)
Paul Rutherford & Iskra 1912, Sequences 72 & 73 (Emanem 4018 CD)
John Stevens' large-scale improv projects, later (1973) identified under the name Spontaneous Music Orchestra to distinguish them from smaller-scale Spontaneous Music Ensemble activities,

assume an important place in the experimental music of late 60s/early 70s Britain where, with groups like the Scratch Orchestra and Portsmouth Sinfonia, they challenged orthodox concepts of music making by, among other things, their use of improvisation and 'anti-virtuosic' approaches to musicianship. In some cases, the latter meant the involvement of amateur musicians, even audience participation, resulting in work that valued collective co-operation and community fellowship above individual virtuosity. These wholesome principles guide **For You To Share**, recorded in January and May 1970, featuring Stevens, Trevor Watts, and "numerous young musicians and audience members". The 37-minute title piece includes sections for massed voices, atmospherically sustaining multitextured drones that sometimes serve as a sonic canvas for Stevens and Watts to paint their vigorous tone-colours, while a previously unissued 'Peace Music' successfully draws on the slow, procession-like pace and vertical density of Japanese gagaku. Comradeship in unpretentious pursuit of musical adventure.

While being one of improv's finest trombonists, Paul Rutherford is also an occasional leader of large-scale groups, most recent being Iskrastra, whose 1998 British festival gigs were unfairly savaged by some critics. Previously unissued **Sequences** dates from 1972 & 73, featuring a 12-piece of improv pioneers (Watts, Parker, Guy, Nicols, Oxley, etc) and several versatile modern jazzers (Perkins, Griffiths, Winstone, etc) who, in following PR's loosely laid framework, superbly integrate pensive small group interplay with turbulent tuttis. Sandwiched between the two big band pieces, is an excerpt from a deliciously transgressive Rutherford solo that started out as a Berio *Sequenza* before unexpectedly becoming a stunningly inventive improvisation. Another Rutherford solo recording is surely long overdue.
Chris Blackford

Joe Gallivan, Innocence
(Cadence Jazz Records CD CJR 1051 CD)
Italian Instabile Orchestra, European Concerts 1994-97 (Neljazz CD 0968-2 CD)
Masaoka Orchestra, What Is The Difference Between Stripping And Playing The Violin?
(Victo CD 058 CD)
Hard Rubber Orchestra, Cruel Yet Fair
(Victo CD 059 CD)

Three recent orchestral CDs received, and Joe Gallivan's, which I reviewed elsewhere in 1992; enough to restate that his method of surrounding first-rate soloists (Dean, Rutherford, Parker, Neil Metcalfe, Guy Barker, Mattos, a.o.) with loose, sympathetic accompaniments works a treat: highly recommended. The first Italian Instabile CD (on Leo Records) became a firm favourite; I'm not (yet) so fond of the follow-up, but at least this enterprising group hasn't lived up to the built-in obsolescence implied in its title. It's important that these are, again, live recordings, despite significant variations in recording levels, and shifts in personnel: the music works well with audiences, even with a hugely varied menu. On hand are veterans (Gaslini, Schiano, Eugenio Colombo, Guido Mazzon), figures who came up in the past decade or so (Carlo Actis Dato, Pino Minafra), wild cards like Giancarlo Schiaffini, and other undervalued players. The long, discursive pieces often reflect Italian folklore, including Colombo's reworking of Schiano's historically important 'Sud'; in the next breath, maybe a more 'orthodox' piece where influences like Bley and Haden are readily acknowledged.

The Masaoka Orchestra is very different; two live pieces working through a kaleidoscope of shifting moods. Some names are familiar from the San Francisco Asian-American improv scene (George Lewis also pops up on the first piece), but it's a collective effort, guided by conducting and cueing that may recall Zorn, or Mengelberg, or Fred Lindberg-Holm in Chicago, yet is appreciably distinct. The first piece is a meditation on the anniversary of the Bomb being dropped on Japan: distant, ethereal voices work their way into the mix, fragments of Glenn Miller start to break through. The 35-minute title track deals with sexual commerce and the notion of 'good girl vs bad girl'; it's a much more vigorous piece, with turntable artists, live electronics and 'funky' piano jazz. The voice of a sex worker, the delightfully-named Daisy Anarchy, is also prominent. Definitely a grower.

Also from Victo, trumpeter John Korsrud's versatile Hard Rubber Orchestra from Vancouver. Their programme might seem a tad schizophrenic,

but some of the punchier, brassier pieces were developed for dance projects; the more reflective ones serve as a useful contrast (even though Korsrud heartily recommends the shuffle option). The up-tempo stuff, often conga-driven, features the wailing guitar of Ron Samworth. There is sometimes a tendency to go for the string-of-solos routine, but players like Graham Ord (soprano) need no second bidding. The contrasts include a 15-second piano miniature, a delicate string duo, and Korsrud's only appearance on the disc — 36 tracks of trumpet, delayed and overlapping, shades of Terry Riley. Not earth-shattering, but a package worth investigating. (*Les Disques Victo, C.P. 460, Victoriaville, Québec G6P 6T3, Canada*)
Gerard F Tierney

Barry Guy/London Jazz Composers Orchestra, Double Trouble Two (Intakt CD 053 CD)
Simon H Fell, Composition No. 30 (Compilation III) (Bruce's Fingers BF 27 2CDs)
While some men keep expensive yachts, Barry Guy runs the luxurious LJCO, a worryingly expensive project to keep afloat in these increasingly parlous times for 'difficult musics'. This 1995 version of *Double Trouble* sees several personnel changes from the previous performance (see Intakt CD 019), notably the introduction of guest pianists Marilyn Crispell and Irène Schweizer and drummer Pierre Favre. Both pianists, guests on previous LJCO works, are in emphatically percussive mood, especially for the opening section, foregrounded against explosive brass and reeds. 'Part II' sees the principal theme triumphantly stated on trumpet (Lowther's?) over a march-like ostinato supplied by Lytton/Favre's snares. Soloists are not always easy to identify (Intakt don't assist here), though Parker's unmistakably busy soprano is on fantastic form, pitched against the full might of the Orchestra in 'Part III'. Dunmall (barnstorming) and Picard (elegantly flowing) also contribute memorable solos to 'Part IV', with its emotional return to the theme on (Bridges'?) bluesy trombone. 'Part V' climaxes in a huge surge of collective power. Guy intelligently transfers activity across the full breadth of the orchestral soundfield to great dramatic effect, sometimes singling out individuals from opposite sides to play together. Unbridled improv energy and notated precision (including breathtaking stops and sudden drops in dynamics) are magnificently combined in yet another glorious work by this peerless improv orchestra.

Composition No. 30 refers to Simon H Fell's most adventurous large-scale work to date, **Compilation III** (**Compilation I & II** date from 1985 and 1990), "for Improvisers, Big Band and Chamber Ensemble", involving 42 musicians. Sadly, the only tutti lasts less than a minute, but the results are exhilarating. Fell's detailed sleevenote presentation is excellent -- lucid technical information which whets the appetite rather than clubbing the prospective listener into a state of intimidated submission before the action begins. Strategies include improvisation, serial notation, and studio contrived "xenochronous combinations" — constructing works from parts of recordings made at different times/places (Zappa's term is "re-synchronization"). The work's wide-ranging tone-colours, derived from unusual instrumental combinations, are immediately impressive; for instance, a quartet of contrabass clarinet, contrabassoon, piccolo and dulcichord in 'Part 1' and 'Part 6'. Likewise, unpredictable transitions from non-idiomatic improv to notated avant-garde chamber to swinging, Mingus influenced jazz are achieved with bags of gusto, though Colin Medlock's jazz-rock guitar tendencies may divide listeners.

Among the highpoints are John Butcher's, Mark Sanders' and Fell's finely controlled, mysterious meeting at the strand of nightmares ('Part 2'); the delicately applied, luminous tones of Orphy Robinson, Rhodri Davies, Sanders and Fell ('Quartet'); and the traumatically inventive noise-improv of Alan Wilkinson (on wonderfully gutsy, commanding form), Stefan Jaworzyn and Fell ('Part 5'). At about 126 minutes, **Compilation III** is a major statement which demands repeat hearings to appreciate the intricacies of Simon H Fell's ingenious structural vision. Compiex it may be, but never too clever by half. And it's especially heartening to see the National Lottery putting its money into art that really matters. (*Intakt Records, P.O. Box 468, CH 8024 Zürich, Switzerland / Bruce's Fingers, 24 Chauntry Road, Haverhill, Suffolk CB9 8BE, England*)
Chris Blackford

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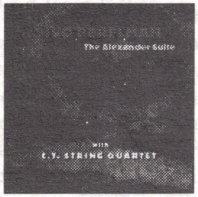

CD LR 258
IVO PERELMAN with THE C.T. STRING QUARTET
THE ALEXANDER SUITE

The tenorman Ivo Perelman says that he has recorded an album which crystallizes everything he has done so far. His melodic nature comes through, while his beautiful lines recall the stew of Brazilian, Jewish, Afro-American and European musics. The CT String Quartet led by Dominic Duval are hardly providing conventional "comping". Breathtaking stuff.

CD LR 260
THEFONDA/ STEVENS GROUP
EVOLUTION

This fourth CD by the Fonda/Stevens Group has been recorded live with Joe Fonda on bass, Michael Jefry Stevens on piano, Herb Robertson on trumpet, Harvey Sorgen on drums and Mark Whitecage on saxophones. The dynamic interplay that has developed within the group over the past four years, the intense musical communication that exists, the methods and principles of playing make this band absolutely unique.

CD LR 257
DOMINIC DUVAL with THE C.T. STRING QUARTET
THE NAVIGATOR

Named in honor of Cecil Taylor, the C.T. String Quartet is Dominic Duval on bass, Tomas Ulrich on cello, Jason Hwang on violin, and Ron Lawrence on viola. The quartet draws its inspiration not only from the present but from the moment of creation, its energy welling from the spontaneous exchange of collective improvisation. The music will change your ideas about string ensembles.

CD LR 259
ANTHONY BRAXTON/ STEWART GILLMOR DUO
14 COMPOSITIONS (TRADITIONAL) 1996

This CD should not be confused with Braxton's recordings of jazz standards. This time he takes us further back into the history of jazz playing songs like "Rosetta", "Kansas City Man Blues", "Star Dust", etc. This is not, however, a nostalgic rendition of old songs good enough for a soundtrack to beer commercials. This is history of jazz through the eyes/ears of a genius who is miles ahead of his time. Braxton plays all reeds including tenor and bass saxophones.

CD LR 261
JOELLE LEANDRE/ WILLIAM PARKER
CONTRABASSES

A live recording by two great bass players at the "Sons d'Hiver" festival on January 9, 1998. Leandre might be identified with European improvisation, while Parker is a cornerstone of the specifically American tradition. But these differences fade before what unites them. You will be struck by the sheer breadth and depth of sound, the orchestral density, the resonance and pitch of the sounds.

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Système Friche, Système Friche
(in Situ IS 169 CD; part of a 3CD set, IS 167-169)
Système Friche are a 15-piece French group jointly led by Jacques Di Donato and Xavier Charles, who supply the notated themes and rhythmic figures that spark off free improvisation among those not engaged in following the charts. 'Unusual' instruments like Dominique Regef's hurdy-gurdy, Camel Zekr's oud and Raphaël Thiery's bagpipes lead the way into exotic avant-renaissance/folk/ethnic territories, while brass, reeds, strings, electric guitar, percussion, and Fréderic Le Junter's amplified objects and sound sculptures, provide multilayers of swirling, whirling, non-idiomatic density. Definitely a big band with a difference, this is a compelling concert performance — not to be missed.

Readers should note that this Système Friche disc is part of characterful French label in Situ's anniversary (which?) 3CD box set. The other discs (IS 167 & 168) comprise fine violin duets (avant-classical meets spiky improv) between Dominique Pifarély and Carlos Zingaro, and saxophonist Guillaume Orti's 4- and 6-piece line-ups (Noël Akchoté, Paul Rogers, Thierry Madiot, a.o.) which adroitly bring together free jazz, avant-rock and abstract improv. (*in Situ, 199 Rue Losserand, 75014 Paris, France*)
Chris Blackford

Butch Morris, Berlin Skyscraper
(FMP CD 92/93 2CDs)
Butch Morris, Cond. #70: Tit For Tat
(For 4 Ears CD927 CD)
Thomas Borgmann's Orkestra, Kith 'N' Kin
(Cadence Jazz Records CJR 1081 CD)
If a compositional framework which privileges improvisation (London Jazz Composers Orchestra, Little Huey Creative Music Orchestra) is one option for the contemporary big band, and total improvisation (Globe Unity, King Übü Orchestrü) is another, then Butch Morris' conductions are the 'third way', a troubling and not entirely convincing approach to shaping the language of freedom. Using a series of gestures and signals, Morris 'creates' the music in real-time, urging the musicians to (con)form in the way only he feels appropriate. For Morris, this helps or forces the players to rethink their 'solutions' to the improvisatory process. But it must be frustrating for an improvisor to have an idea in development suddenly suppressed. The temptation must exist to simply close your eyes and let loose.

Berlin Skyscraper would have benefited from such abandon. There are many lengthy passages of ill-defined, featureless playing when the accumulated, episodic sounds resolutely refuse to cohere into anything worthwhile. With excellent improvisors like Wolfgang Fuchs and Alex Dörner present, it is a pity that they weren't given free-to-roam tickets and allowed to invigorate the entire ensemble. But how much does knowing the organisational procedures influence the way in which we hear the results? If reservations about the corrupt political analogies that can be drawn are left aside, then the surprise is that despite its unevenness there is still some remarkable music instigated on these recordings. It can hardly be a coincidence that the most successful of the Berlin conductions is '456', the last meeting at which much of the attenuated tentativeness of the other pieces is replaced by a unity of purpose, bracketed by fragmented lyricism.

The Berlin group includes musicians from 'straight' and improvisational backgrounds and leans towards conventional orchestral instrumentation (oboe, cello, violin, bassoon, etc). By contrast the group assembled for **Tit For Tat** includes electronics in many guises, and perhaps for that reason, or simply because there are some of Switzerland's finest musicians sitting in (Hans Koch, Martin Schütz, Fredy Studer, Stephan Wittwer, etc), it's a thrilling, crackling, buzzing, whirring, oscillating performance. Whether this vindicates the 'third way', however, is still in question.

Thomas Borgmann offered a basic set of guidelines to the other nine musicians he gathered together as Orkestra Kith 'N' Kin, and then trusted their worth as improvisors to sustain the music at a high creative level. A reasonable conviction given that the group includes Hans Reichel, Lol Coxhill, Martin Mayes, Mark Sanders and others, all of whom contribute to developing an engrossing, often frantic, sometimes subdued, but always collective music making. **R**
Declan O'Driscoll

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ShortCuts

Reviewed by
Chris Blackford

Eddie Prévost, *Loci Of Change* (Matchless Recordings MRCD32 CD); **Eddie Prévost/Organum**, *Flayed/Crux* (Matchless Recordings MRCD27 CD) Hard to believe that it's taken around 30 years for British percussionist Eddie Prévost to record a solo album. But **Loci Of Change**, appropriately subtitled "Sound and Sensibility", has been well worth the wait, and is certain to captivate those souls already enthralled by the recent solo outings of Pierre Favre, Lê Quan Ninh and Gino Robair. Prévost's improv sensitivity, with AMM especially, is legendary, and of course all the more apparent on **Loci** where his playing radiates an unhurried, contemplative authority.

Like Varèse, who understood percussion both as a means of creating new soundworlds and evoking a sense of mankind's "cosmic roots" (a phrase nearly stripped of all sensible meaning by late 60s, consumerist psychedelic culture), Prévost creates rich, multilayered soundscapes (without overdubbing) which are distinctly modern, yet tap (pun intended) into something primordial and mysterious. Not surprising really, considering the importance of percussion in the sacred rituals of numerous ancient religions. His use of gongs and cymbals (presumably set in sustained motion by motorised beaters) effectively suggest shimmering, spatial depth and expanse, whereas bowing and plucking strings on a barrel drum generate darker, earthier colours and textures. Close listening will reveal a host of glowing resonances hovering nimbus-like above the more strident gestures. Hopefully Eddie won't keep us waiting another 30 years before his next wondrous solo recording.

Another who understands the ancient/modern duality is David Jackman of Organum, whose discreet but telling use of bowed cymbals and electronics on 'Flayed' was as close as Eddie Prévost came to making a solo recording prior to 1996. **Flayed/Crux** LP was issued with little publicity by Silent Records in 1987, finding EP in ebullient mood, harnessing reverberant acoustics to produce dramatic cymbal cascades and tempestuous drumming. 'Crux' (minus Prévost) is Jackman plus Dinah Jane Rowe, Andrew Chalk and Nurse With Wound's Stephen Stapleton, who plays his beloved "very rusty" metal chair. Austere percussive scrapes and squeals cut into throbbing metallic drones and icy flute tones in an intense, thoroughly engrossing piece without obvious beginning or end, where time seems suspended. A necessary reissue. (*Matchless Recordings, 2 Shetlock's Cottages, Matching Tye, nr Harlow, Essex CM17 OQR, England*)

Hal Rammel/Lou Mallozzi, *Whole Or By The Slice* (Penumbra Music CD004 CD) An oddity even by **Rubberneck** standards from US improvisor/instrument inventor Hal Rammel and audio artist Lou Mallozzi, best known for his vocal/textual collages. On 'Our Home Canary' the pair recontextualises a crackly old 78rpm about birdsong by eerily juxtaposing it with what sounds like a zipper in motion and tiny percussive tinklings. Indeed, it's hard to be certain from exactly what materials many of these soundworlds are constructed, and therein lies the mystery and fascination of this work, its microstructural fragility reminiscent of Hugh Davies' subtle pursuits. 'Scissors Paper' is a deft combination of perhaps drifting radio signals (minus the human content) and barely audible nocturnalish sounds, or maybe even 'just' amplified scissors cutting paper; the title track brings out the playful side of electroacoustics, while 'Slice And Anti-slice' focuses on the grainy, whispery nuances of Terri Kapsalis' violin. Delightfully bewildering soundworlds await the fearless explorer. Investigate. (*Penumbra Music, P.O. Box 282, Grafton, WI 53024, USA*)

Charles Wharf/Simon H Fell, *Frankenstein* (Bruce's Fingers BF 25 CD); **Simon H Fell/Martin Archer**, *Pure Water Construction* (Discus 11 CD); **Burn/Davies/Durrant/Wastell**, *Assumed Possibilities* (Confront Recordings FRONT 05 CD) Those familiar with the tape manipulation techniques on **M.M.** (1991), Wharf's and Fell's last album, will have some idea of what mutative feats this duo are capable of. But **Frankenstein** goes further, *much* further into the realm of "xenochronous

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combinations" — Fell's term for compositions constructed from sampled improvisations (their own, of course), plus, in this case, Bach and Grachan Moncur fixations. And what macabre fun they've obviously had stitching together all this timbrally monstrous material. James Whale's 1931 horror classic supplies the central operational metaphor, as well as sleeve photography and most of the track titles which are wrenched from the screenplay. They also throw in some well-timed, tongue-in-cheek stormy sound effects for Gothic good measure. Fell's double bass is hugely vibrant, full of sinewy detail; his rediscovered bass guitar roars like Squire's and Wetton's of old. Wharf's reeds even manage a few bursts of melody, but mostly grip the attention with a penetrating, abstract vigour. For nearly an hour, this world of bizarre, brutish splendour is skilfully maintained by a consistently warped sense of logic.

Like Simon H Fell, Martin Archer has spent the last few years using sampled improvisations as the rich, timbral raw material for electroacoustic compositions (see **Ghost Lily Cascade** on Discus) and, in the process, reinvigorating the stagnant world of electroacoustics with 'non-academic' strategies. Here, he and Fell base each part of their "electroacoustic suite" on a solo improv performance, manipulating this while adding other processed improvised and composed material. 'Part 1' (they commence punctiliously with 'Part 0'), based on Robin Hayward's tuba, sounds like a field recording from a shed full of old steam engines; the oddly foregrounded tiny percussives add delicate touches to an evocative piece. Rhodri Davies' harp is at the heart of 'Part 3', another highlight, where the sensitive, chamber-like expressivity of Archer, Fell and Charlie Collins gives the illusion of a fully real-time quartet interaction. Other samplees include Gino Robair, Chris Burn and Stefan Jaworzyn.

Assumed Possibilities is a haven for those fatigued by the excesses of overpriced, high decibel Japanese improv. Four improvisors who understand the meaning and use of understatement and close listening. When aforementioned Burn plays directly on the piano's strings, which he often does, this is string quartet music of the most adventurous order. Although sounds of indefinite pitch predominate, pitch has not been entirely abandoned. Phil Durrant (violin) and Mark Wastell (cello) achieve some of the most delicate, finely etched tones you're likely to hear, which tremble at the threshold of silence, while Davies' harp — an increasingly important voice in British improv — casts dappled light across a sometimes sombre, introspective soundfield. Like the mature style of Scelsi, this quartet's non-idiomatic music attains a minutely focused intensity, where the subtlest shifts in pitch, timbre and texture speak volumes. Sensitive music for sensitive ears. (*Bruce's Fingers, 24 Chauntry Road, Haverhill, Suffolk CB9 8BE, England / Discus, P.O. Box 658, Sheffield S10 3YR, England / Confront Recordings, Flat 2, 14 Lascotts Road, London N22 4JN*)

Thinking Plague, *In Extremis* (Cuneiform Rune 113 CD); **Bob Drake**, *Little Black Train* (Crumbling Tomes Archive CTA 6 CD) It's been 10 years since the last Thinking Plague album, **In This Life** (ReR), and in that time they've made a few personnel changes. Deborah Perry is the new vocalist, Dave Willey the latest bass guitarist, and 5uu's David Kerman has taken over as drummer. Multi-instrumentalist, Bob Drake (also 5uu's), has had limited contact with the Colorado based group since 1994, however he appears on half of these recordings (1992-1998). Principal composer and guitarist Mike Johnson is still at the heart of things.

While TP's trademark chamber harmonic/rhythmic rock complexity is still evident on **In Extremis**, there's a noticeable move towards 'symphonic' gestures where synths are concerned — a feature more typical of 5uu's work. Also, a greater sense of studio manipulation of events, and here one suspects the innovative influence of ace recording engineer Drake, whose stratospheric vocals grace 'This Weird Wind'. Unexpected vaudeville and circus elements work wonderfully well on 'Les Etudes d'Organism', whereas 'The Aesthete' and 'Kingdom Come' brilliantly demonstrate their unpredictable approach to extended songcraft. With so much intricate compositional and instrumental flair on offer, repeat hearings are essential. Welcome back guys.

A rare opportunity to hear Bob Drake in solo context. **Little Black Train** was performed, recorded and mixed by him at his home studio during 1995-96, from where he forces C&W/bluegrass, country rock and progressive rock through the shredder of an avant-garde sensibility. The hybrid he then constructs is as compelling as it is unlikely.

There's not one weak piece in 15, and all are packed with remarkable multitrack overlay and kaleidoscopic changes in harmonic colour. 'No Title' gets its lovely melody from a raspy violin which recurs amid numerous bold rhythmic twists and turns; 'Outside Influences', is a kind of strangulated Jon Anderson struggling for air against pounding bass and rhythm guitar mayhem. The epic guitar theme on 'Ends Of Time' rides the crest of a wave of formidable density, and the peculiar poignancy of the avant-ballad 'The Unattended Funeral' provides an interesting contrast to the many instrumental pieces. Similarities with Beefheart and Chadbourne, maybe, but Bob Drake's studio mastery and extraordinary arrangements mark him out as an original. (*Cuneiform Records, P.O. Box 8427, Silver Spring, MD 20907-8427, USA / Crumbling Tomes Archive, c/o ReR Megacorp, 79 Beulah Road, Thornton Heath, Surrey CR7 8JG, England*)

Bill Bruford/Tony Levin, *Upper Extremities* (Papa Bear PBCD3/ Discipline Global Mobile DGM 9805 CD); **Soixante Etages**, *Heatproof Cauldrons For Wanglers* (33revpermi 9809 CD) Avant-noise guitarist and loops/FX merchant David Torn is a striking performer, but seldom heard in stimulating collaborations. **Upper Extremities**, however, is tailor-made for his ragged sheets-of-sound style. Fellow guest, trumpeter Chris Botti, is a lot less congruous, his lean jazzy lines too polite for these often menacing circumstances. Consequently, the "power trio" pieces work best. Bill Bruford and Tony Levin, the redoubtable polyrhythmic force behind King Crimson, are in superfine fettle; hear how Bruford's outrageous slow counter-rhythms and machine-gun snare intelligently build tension against Levin's racing bass and Torn's night-marish shriek and sprawl on the powerful opener, 'Cerulean Sea'. Bookended by Levin's plaintive arco bass, 'Cracking The Midnight Glass' is another potent, rhythm-section driven ramraid with Torn unleashing caustic mayhem. 'Cobalt Canyons' is in a similarly vicious vein. But they have their reflective moments to balance out the angst, plus a few quirky interludes to keep us guessing. Gripping stuff.

Reissue time for **Heatproof Cauldrons For Wanglers**, debut by the Soixante Etages collective which launched France's Nancy based 33revperimi label in 1990. The collective had been formed in 1982 but these recordings date from 1988, plus two bonus tracks from a little later. **Wanglers** finds an imaginative avant-rock group working towards top-notch, robust experimental albums like **Revolutionary Suicide** (1994) and **De sa bouche de loup** (1997) where noise based improv and tapes/turntables disorientation would test avant-rock rhythms to destruction. But on **Wanglers** the rhythm section tends to channel the raw energy flow of guitars through rockier terrain. 'The Convict', 'Fernet' and 'The Warmy Style Of The Fragile Simple' are among tracks that recall Pere Ubu during their most inventive phase (see **New Picnic Time** and **The Art Of Walking**) with well-judged use of disrupted linear progression and rambling/hollered vocals. (*Discipline Global Mobile, P.O. Box 1533, Salisbury, Wiltshire SP5 5ER, England / 33revpermi, B.P. 30042, F54012 Nancy Cedex, France*)

Peter Hammill, *This* (Fie! FIE 9118CD) **This** is Peter Hammill's 40th album, released on the eve of his 50th birthday in his 30th year of music making. Hammill is the Ingmar Bergman of rock, one of the genre's genuine auteurs, obsessively exploring a cluster of cherished existential themes like Time, Consciousness and Memory, with a philosophical and emotional acuity, allied to a formal inventiveness, that few others engaged in song-writing have attained. And still a new PH album is capable of surprising even the long-time listener. **This** has its mysterious "fragments"; carnal, malevolent and dense 'Always Is Next'; and forbidding, pulseless, polar epic in 'The Light Continent'. Plus superb RidArt design. Peter Hammill's considerable creative powers remain undiminished. (*Fie! Records, 1 Walcot Gate, Bath BA1 5UG, England*) **R**

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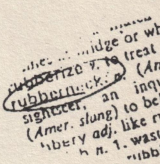
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